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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[ON A FALSE SCENT.]

DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

CHAPTER XVI.

"What's the matter with you, lovie?" inquired Mrs. Raff, soothingly, as she entered, and found me in floods of tears. "Have you been having a quarrel with Mr. Joe? He is ill to cross when his mind is set on a thing; and if you will take my advice, you will make it up as sweet as sugar as soon as ever he comes in. It's only a lover's quarrel!" "I'll never make it up!" I cried, furiously. "Do you know that he has kidnapped me here, against my will?—and all he wants to marry me for is my money, and that I hate him!" "Oh, now dearie! He tells me he is devoted! And he is your own cousin, and has your father's and his father's consent!" "His father's consent I can easily believe. He is an old robber!—a rascal!—a thief!—worse than a thief! As to my father's consent, I don't believe for a moment he ever gave it! He would rather have seen me in my coffin

than married to Joe Manners, and I know I would much rather be there myself, than be his wife!"

"Easy, easy now!" said Mrs. Raff, in an oily tone. "Don't go and excite yourself, lovie! See what it is to be a great heiress! You have to pay the penalty, and —"

"And I won't!" Mrs. Raff, like a good woman, do lend me five shillings. I'll pay it back with interest, and send for a cab for me. You shall never have cause to regret your kindness if you help me in my present great distress!"

Mrs. Raff looked hard at me, and blinked her one eye. It was red; and as to her nose, I could not have believed that that organ could have taken such a violent hue! It was bright crimson, and shone as if it had been varnished.

"I'll see what I can do for you, dearie. I'll send for a cab presently. You see I will!"

"Not presently, but now!" I cried, feverishly. "Oh! Mrs. Raff, I appeal to you as a woman! I am an orphan, and utterly friendless, excepting for my old nurse, to whom I wish to go."

"And where does she live, darling?"

"Lavender-place, Edgware-road," I replied, consulting the memo in my otherwise empty purse.

"And name—lovie?"

"Name! Clark!"

"Oh! well! after the beds are made, and dinner is got and ordered, I'll just slip out and get you a cab, and maybe go over with you myself. I won't be ready for an hour, so you might just sit down and take a read of the morning's paper, and keep yourself amused."

"But you will be as quick as ever you can?" I entreated. "Time is everything, and he may come back at any moment!"

"No fear! I'll be as quick as ever I can—you'll see—and have yourself ready, and your hat on by twelve!"

I had myself ready, and my hat on by twelve, according to directions, but no Mrs. Raff appeared—no, nor at half-past. At one o'clock, when I was nearly frantic, she bustled in briskly, still in her morning costume, and assured me that there was not a cab on the stand, but she had sent Tilda for one half a mile off, and it would be here directly.

As she spoke an empty four-wheeler went very slowly by, and the man, seeing me watching at the open window, put up his whip, which I took for a sign that he wanted a fare, and nodded, and eagerly called out, "Yes, wait a moment! we are coming, or," turning to Mrs. Raff, "perhaps you will be putting yourself out to come—I can just as well go alone? Now will you kindly lend me the five shillings? You may be sure I shall repay you!"

"No, dearie! I can't. I have not sixpence in the house—no, not as much as a penny stamp!"

"Oh! Mrs. Raff! and what am I to do? I must go!"

"Who must go? What's all this?" said a hateful voice in the doorway, and there stood Joe. "Who is the cab for? and what is the meaning of this?" he demanded, not of me, but of Mrs. Raff, and truly he eyed her savagely.

"I'm only just humouring her, and putting her off till you come in. She has been just cracked to get away ever since you turned your back this morning. Wanting money, wanting a cab, wanting to run away!" nodding her head at every separate want.

"And so you were only playing with me!" I cried, scarcely able to articulate the words, so great was my passion.

"That's all, love," she answered, in the frankest manner. "Shure I'm older than you, and know what's for your good."

"See here, miss," said Joe, producing some document out of his pocket. "Do you know what this is? Because, if not, I'll tell you. It's a special licence. I've been driving this three hours, and this is the neat result. We are going to be married on Saturday, so give me a kiss, my pretty goldylocks!" As he said this he made a kind of grab at me, but with a shriek I tore myself away, and madly rushed into my own sanctum, and locked and also barricaded the door.

I remained there till dark, refusing offers of luncheon and dinner, and being assured through the keyhole by my genial friend that he would soon starve me out!

That night he evidently had some beam companions in for a carouse. They drank, of course, and smoked, and made no end of noise; and during this symposium I heard a gentle scratching at my door, and stooping down I said—

"Who's there?"

"It's only Tilda, miss! Open the door, it's all right!"

I opened the door accordingly, and discovered Tilda bearing a small tray, on which was placed some cold meat, bread-and-butter, and a glass of beer. I was not sorry to see these things, for I was desperately hungry. She sat the tray on the chest of drawers, and I set to work to eat the provisions at once.

"Well, miss," said Tilda, "you have had a poor time of it to-day; that I will say!"

"Have I not! And imagine what my life would be if I were to marry that tipsy wretch! Where is that wicked old woman, Mrs. Raff?"

"She's gone to bed. She's had with the cramps."

"Delighted to hear it!" I exclaimed viciously. "Now, Tilda, I hope you are not like her; all my faith is invested in you. Did you get the stamp?"

"Here it is, miss, and I have the ink and a pen outside in a corner for you to address the envelope. I stole them away when I went in with soda-water just now."

"That is a good girl. Will it go to-night—this letter?" I asked, when I had duly stamped and directed it.

"To be sure it will. I'll run out with it now, myself."

"Thank you, a thousand times! And here is what I promised you," I said, taking off my watch and handing it to her. "You stand by me, Tilda, and I'll make it well worth your while. I shall give you more than your year's wages."

"It is a real little beauty, miss. I must

not let Mrs. Raff see it. She is a nice old hypocrite she is, and would promise anything and tell as many lies as there are minutes in an hour. You can place no dependence on her, miss; but you may trust me, as you would the Bank of England!"

"And you see I do; for I pay you beforehand. I give you what I value more than anything, and I shall surely redeem it from you at a good price. How soon do you think I shall have an answer to my letter?"

"With good luck you ought to have an answer by the last post to-morrow evening. I'll make sure and take it out of the letter-box."

"I hope so, I am sure, for this is Wednesday night, and if nothing sets me free before Saturday I am sure I shall lose my reason!"

"You do look a bit wild, miss, but you must not talk of losing your mind; then he would clap you into a lunatic asylum, and have every penny of your money for himself. Ha, I suppose, is your next heir?"

"He is—he or uncle! I never thought of that before."

"Well, think of it now, miss; and if I were you I would not go mad just to please him! I must be off now, for I hear them stirring their chairs in the next room; and you may rely upon me about the letter."

And I did rely on her. Next day I ventured even into the sitting-room, and the abhorred company of Joe, solely that I might sit at the window and watch the postman; and all day long—I think there were seven deliveries—I watched in vain. I saw them spring up the steps, and rattle next door, and each time my heart bounded with hope; and each time as they passed the gate it sank in despair.

Towards evening I took to watching the cabs; and all day long next day, till dusk, I sat at my post counting the hours, counting the posts, counting the cabs, but no one came for me, and no letter.

Peggy never would have deceived me, but Tilda was as bad, if not worse, than her mistress! As I sat in my place with averted looks she came over, and under pretence of arranging the blind said, audaciously—

"Gust up, miss, it will come yet. There's lots of time."

"There was lots of time for an answer, but the letter never was posted!" I replied, looking her steadily in the face.

She coloured, and avoided my eyes. It did not need that to assure me of her treachery.

"I suppose you will keep the watch all the same," I said, in a freezing voice. "Mrs. Raff, bad as she is, was so far honest—I gave her nothing."

"Miss, dear, I swear to you—"

"Hush! say no more."

"I say, goldylocks," said Joe—who had been out most of the afternoon (much to my relief)—"I am going to take you to a theatre this evening. Why should we not have a bit of a spree! I have taken a box at the Gaiety, a stage box—and I've brought you home a bouquet the size of a small tea-table. Here, see it's all white—bridal flowers! If you put them in water they will come in nicely for to-morrow. What! you would, would you?" as I dashed them into the empty grate. "We have a fine high temper of our own, and I like it in a woman as much as in a horse, for it gives far more amusement in the breaking in. Ah! you have never had a taste of that yet. Well, better late than never!"

"No, and never will!"

"Oh! you are very fond of the word *never*! my lady, and let me tell you that it is an uncommonly silly word for a girl in her teens to use to me. You thought you would get round Mrs. Raff, did you? You thought you would bribe poor, honest Tilda!" (poor, honest Tilda!) but you made a little mistake for once. I knew my ground when I was bringing you here; you did not! These two women would no more let you escape than a couple of cats would let off a mouse. Come, Tilda," to this poor honest girl, who had just

entered, "get dinner at once. We are going to the theatre; so look sharp!"

And, sure enough, in an hour's time I found myself—minus hat or jacket, just in my plain every day black dress and white frill—driving off to the theatre with Joe and the big bouquet (which he had insisted on bringing, saying it would look well on the front of the box) lying on the seat opposite me. A bridal bouquet, indeed!

I had resolved to make a bold dash for liberty that night if by any chance my cousin's attention was diverted for a moment. I would run out of the theatre and throw myself upon the compassion of the first policeman, or even the first passer-by.

CHAPTER XVII.

Of course it is needless to remark that I had never been in a theatre before, and had the very vaguest ideas as to what a theatre was like.

First, when we arrived, we walked through a large lighted vestibule lined with marble pillars and large plants, and palms in pots. Then we ascended a staircase and went along a corridor, and finally a door was opened, and we were in a stage-box.

"I was determined to do it in a style when I went about it all," said Joe, complacently.

"None of your cheap back places for me! Besides, I like to sit where I am well seen when I have a good-looking girl along with me."

"How is it that you can play the polished and agreeable gentleman sometimes?" I inquired, "when at heart you are such a dreadfully low, common, vulgar creature?"

"Now, now! none of that kind of talk—no calling names, my little dear! It's a full house. This piece always draws like smoke."

It was a very full house, as he remarked. It seemed to me a sea of faces from floor to ceiling, and not one among them that I had ever seen before.

Cousin Joe, on the contrary, recognised at least a dozen of his own sort, and grinned and nodded affably in various directions. He was apparently proud of my companionship, for he made me draw up and sit well in front of the box, and approached his chair very close to me, leant his arm on the back of it in an attitude of easy familiarity, and proceeded to sweep the scene with a pair of borrowed opera-glasses.

"Lots of people are looking up here!" he observed, after a short silence. "And no wonder! You really are an uncommon-looking girl, for all your white face. I think it's your golden hair that fetches them. There is Tommy Long, of the *Paddock* newspaper, and Bob Caswell, the comic singer. They only want a nod from me to fly up here and be presented. They will wonder who you are, and their questions might be a little awkward. Only the next time they see me you will be my wife! It's rather compromising for a girl to be seen at places of amusement with a young man! I suppose you know that?"

"You are not a young man," I replied, "you are bald. Besides, you are my cousin, you can tell them that, and that you will never be any nearer relation."

"Oh, won't I! Just wait, and you will see!"

At this remark I turned my back on him as far as was possible and this manoeuvre brought my eye to bear on our neighbours in the next box.

Two pretty girls, beautifully dressed, and two men and an elderly lady, they one and all stared hard at me. And I gazed back full at the two girls, both so refined, so elegant-looking, who had probably never had a care in all their lives.

As I looked in ignorant wonder and admiration their lips curled, their expression became haughty and contemptuous; they whispered behind their fans and giggled, and

looked at me again with unabated scornful curiosity.

Decidedly they despised me, and classed me with my odious companion. I felt the blood rising to my cheeks, and turned away hastily with a very sore feeling at my heart. These two girls were the first young ladies of my own age and station that I had ever been close to in all my life, and their airs and looks were a keen disappointment.

Presently the curtain fell on the first act, and ere the orchestra had played three bars our box burst open, and we had visitors—a large fair (artificially fair) lady in a low dress of sea-green satin, much trimmed with rather dirty white lace, long gloves, also rather soiled, and a bouquet of rich flowers.

She was followed by a man with very curly black hair, and a waxen mustache. He also exhibited a profusion of rings, and a vast expanse of shirt-front.

"Well Joe, how goes it?" inquired the lady, playfully tapping him with her fan. "This is one of my nights off, and I am among the audience. When I saw you perched up in a stage-box, looking as if the whole show belonged to you, I thought I would just drop in and ask if your ship had arrived, or if you had come in for a fortune, or what was the news?"

"Yes," said Joe, "I am going to get my deserts at last, Lizzie. I am going to be a rich man! This is my cousin from India—Miss Manners. She is my father's ward, and has the fortune of a Begum, and I am glad to tell you that she is going to bestow both hand and fortune on me! Diana, this is Miss Lizzie De Montmorency, of the Cockatoo Theatre, and Mr. Talbot, her agent and manager."

"Delighted, I am sure, to make your acquaintance," said Miss De Montmorency, gushingly. "I've known Joe for years—you must keep him in order, my dear! Joe is a very bad boy," and she laughed boisterously.

"I have nothing to say to keeping him in order," I replied indignantly, "and do not believe him when he tells you he is going to marry me—he is not."

"That's her little joke," said Joe, facetiously. "She is an awfully funny girl, and has a great deal of dry humour about her, though you would not guess it."

"Well, I am glad to hear it, for I like a good laugh. All the same, I fancy Miss Manners' humour is too refined to be appreciated by me. By the way, Joe, since you are so pressing, we will all take supper with you at the old place. By all, I allude to Nellie and Jack Fraser, and Talbot, and me. You might send round soon and tell them to put the champagne in ice!"

"Well, I will!" said Joe, in a burst of generosity. "It's a poor heart that never rejoices, and my cousin here would like to see something of the world. She has been brought up all her life as quietly as if she were in a convent—she was never in a theatre in her life till to-night!"

"You don't say so!" rejoined Miss De Montmorency, opening her grey eyes very wide—she had a jolly-looking, good-natured, face, and I thought if the worst came to the worst I would throw myself on her protection. "Well, you have a great treat in store, in going the rounds of the different 'shows.' You must come to see me in 'Married to a Monster.' I daresay Joe has told you that he is rather partial to my acting—and to me—but quite in a brotherly way; you need not be a bit jealous."

"That is the last thing likely to occur to me with regard to my cousin Joe."

"Well, ta, ta, for the present," she said, rising with a theatrical gesture; "we shall meet anon," and giving Joe a playful tap with her fan she sailed out of the box.

The curtain was rising on act two, and exhibiting a very brilliant scene, which, novel as it was, had no charms for me. My eyes, on the contrary, roved over the dense crowds of strange faces that filled the pit, stalls, and boxes. Not one of them all—old, young, hand-

some, or ugly—was the face of a friend, which, considering how extremely limited my circle was, was not the least surprising. As I gazed in a dull, apathetic way, my heart suddenly gave a bound—such a bound that set it off palpitating faster than it had ever beaten in its life. Unless my eyes deceived me, as I sat there looking hopelessly down, with cold clammy hands clasped in my lap, there in the stalls, in the third row from the orchestra, and within two chairs of the end, sat a man who was either Captain Halford or his ghost. The more I looked the more confident I became that I was gazing at no ghost, but at the man himself.

Oh! if he would but see me, and save me! Alas! his attention was entirely devoted to the stage; he never once took his eyes from it, save now and then to consult a paper in his hand—the programme.

How was I to attract his attention? Attract it I must! Since I had been certain of his identity I had taken heart. I was convinced most firmly that he was the plank destined to rescue me from the sea of misery in which I was engulfed. I must keep my head, and be cool, that was certain. Whilst I strenuously thought over ways and means, a brilliant idea struck me. I noticed a considerable show of jewels, especially diamonds, on ladies in the stalls and boxes, but all theirs put together could not eclipse or shine down mine.

They were still tied up in my handkerchief. I put my hand in my pocket, and felt them there. Why not put them on, and thereby attract universal attention with that dazzling ring of light round my neck! But first of all I must pave the way and break my bright intention very delicately to Joe; so concluding a long and sulky silence I said, in a most innocent manner—

"Cousin Joe, I see many people wearing diamonds; that lady opposite, for instance, has rather bright ones. Would they be considered—"

"Considered good!" he echoed. "I should rather imagine that they are! That is the Countess of Storr, and those are the celebrated Storr diamonds."

"They are not half as bright as mine," I replied. "I don't think much of them; but then you have not seen my necklace, have you?"

"Ah! no," he rejoined, with the utmost composure, little guessing that I had witnessed Carry's display of the contents of the pin-cushion, and a lie more or less made no difference to him.

"Would you like to see them?" I inquired, politely.

"Yes, of course I should; but where are they? They are down at Rivals' Green, are they not?"

"Oh no! I never move without them; they are far too precious to be out of my own keeping. I have them in my pocket now."

"You have them—where?" demanded Joe, aghast.

"In my pocket," was my composed reply.

"Good gracious! and supposing your pocket was picked?"

"How could it be, when I drove here all the way? Would you like to see the necklace?"

"I would; and you had better let me take it in charge," he added, with rather suspicious eagerness.

"Then here it is!" I said, drawing forth my parcel and slowly unknitting it.

In another moment the wrappings of chamois leather were off, and there lay the Begum's necklace glittering in my lap.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Joe, "I never saw anything to come near that! It has a brilliancy and a look about it that almost stuns one at first sight! No wonder people talk of Begum's jewels! I should think that necklace was matchless," he added, eyeing it greedily. "Fifteen thousand pounds is a long way under the mark—that is, if it were broken up, and the stones disposed of separately."

"But it is never going to be broken up. I

mean to put it on and eclipse that lady opposite. Shall I, and draw all the sparks of light to myself?"

"Yes, do! It ought to make a great show over your black dress."

And it did. In another second it was clasped on, and I turned my eyes to Joe to judge of the effect—blinding, as usual.

"It beats everything! That centre stone especially is like a great eye of fire! It actually blazes at me as if it would like to do me some bodily harm. It looks as if it had a devil in it!"

"You have made a very good hit, cousin Joe. That centre stone is called 'the Evil Eye,' and they say it is bewitched, and that this necklace brings ill-luck to whoever meddles with it. It is hundreds of years old, as you may judge by the setting."

"Well, it has never brought you any bad luck."

"Perhaps not directly; but I have had nothing but misfortune ever since it came into my possession, of which my chiefest after father's death was my present situation."

"Then give it to me," he exclaimed, with a chuckle, "and I'll chance the ill-luck and Evil Eye into the bargain."

"I may not part with it—in fact, if I were superstitious I would say it would not be bestowed or got rid of; it sticks to its owner for life!"

"Well, I am not superstitious, and if you will be advised by me, you will have it broken up and sold in Amsterdam. It is too magnificent for a mere private person, and too dangerous and tempting an ornament. It is more suitable to be among Crown jewels, or on the neck of some reigning queen, than in the possession of an unsophisticated little chit in a black cashmere frock, who carries it in her pocket rolled up in a handkerchief."

"See! Everyone is looking this way. They have all spotted it, and no wonder," he cried exultantly.

What Joe said was perfectly true. The amount of eyes now fastened on our box—on me and on my diamonds—was positively overwhelming. I was dreadfully embarrassed, as may well be imagined. Fancy a secluded creature, like myself, having to stand the battery of about a thousand pairs of eyes! However, my ordeal would not be too dearly bought, if only the pair of eyes would see me. But would they?

My neighbours in the next box were plainly overwhelmed that I, a shabby, country girl, associated with a red-faced, dissipated-looking man, should suddenly invest my person with a necklace worth a king's regalia, was, I fancy, the most utterly astounding incident they had ever come across in all their experience. How they stared—far more respectfully this time—and how they whispered!

It seemed to me that everyone stared, and dozens of opera-glasses were fixed upon me, and Joe was actually inflated with pride, and leant back and stuck his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and looked forth on the audience as much as to say, "Am I not a very fine fellow? This girl and her diamonds belong to me."

In spite of all my attractiveness, Captain Halford had never once glanced towards me as yet. Oh! if he would, and would recognise me, thanks to my necklace, and its magnetic glitter, I would never, as long as I lived, call my necklace bewitched or unlucky again; for if he noticed me, and saved me, I would have to enter this great good fortune to the credit of my diamonds.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At length the curtain fell, and Joe satiated with triumph rose, and said he thought if I did not mind he would "go and stretch his legs, and have a smoke" for smoke can't drink, mind! No words could express my joy when I saw him rise. At the same moment, having now nothing to divert his attention in front,

Captain Halford turned, and looked up, and his glance fell on me. I saw him look steadily towards me, then he had recourse to his glasses. As the box-door slammed on Joe I leant over, and without a thought of whether it was proper or not, eagerly beckoned to him to join me. So hasty was his acceptance of my invitation that he must actually have passed Joe in the passage, for even to my impatient brain barely a minute had elapsed before Captain Halford stood in Joe's place, with his hand in mine.

"Oh, Miss Manners! This is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure! When did you arrive in England? who would have expected to see you? and how is your father?"

"This is for my father," I said, touching my black gown. "I have no time to tell you all now. Seconds are precious, my gaoler has only just left me for a moment. Captain Halford, I appeal to you to save me. I have not a friend in the world, except Peggy, my nurse; and your last words to me that morning we parted at the old Palace were—"

"I know! and I stand by them now, Miss Manners. They were, if you ever want a friend you have one in Hugh Halford. What can I do for you? What is your trouble?"

"My father made his only brother my guardian. His name is Isaac Manners, and he and his wicked daughter-in-law, who is a widow, and his dreadful son, have me entirely in their power. I heard them plotting, and they divided me and my possessions as follows: Joe is to marry me, and have twenty thousand pounds; Carrie my necklace, and Uncle Isaac will take ten thousand for his share, and thinks it but moderate."

"And what is your cousin like?"

"He is odious, hateful! He—he drinks; yes, and he has not a penny in the world, and is over head and ears in debt. He and Carrie brought me to town for the day, and then he decoyed me to a lodging, where he has kept me a prisoner for a week. I bribed the servant with my watch to post a letter for me. She took the bribe, but I know Peggy never got the letter. He, Joe, has bought a license. He says he is going to marry me to-morrow; that is my wedding bouquet; he bought it this afternoon. Rather than marry Joe I shall kill myself somehow, and if you save me now, Captain Halford, I shall owe you my life."

"Save you! Of course I will. I shall take you off to my aunt's, and then you can snap your fingers at your nice relations. It is rather awkward that this dreadful old uncle is your guardian, and you are under age, but we will manage to beat them. I see you have the diamonds, on—the famous necklace!"

"Yes, I only put it on—it was tied up in my handkerchief—knowing it would attract notice, and hoping it would catch your eyes. For a long time you never looked this way, and I began to despair, when luckily, just as Joe was leaving, you looked up. Oh! Captain Halford, I feel, I know, that you will save me. My hopes begin to rise once more."

"Where are you living? Where are these lodgings?"

"At Paradise-place; but we are not going straight home. We are going to supper with some actresses at the Golden Rose Restaurant, and you will have to be very sharp, and plan some way of escape, for Joe watches me like a lynx. Several times I have tried to elude him, and failed. Here," detaching my necklace, "please keep this. Put it in your pocket; it will be something out of the fire at least—something beyond Joe's reach."

"No, no! I keep it myself," he replied.

"I won't," pushing it back. "If I escape I can have it again; if not I give it to you. I should like you to have it. It is worth a great deal of money, and I hope it will bring you more luck than it has ever brought me!"

"Miss Manners, excuse me, you are talking nonsense! Excuse me, do you imagine that I am going to rob you of your lovely diamonds?"

"No, but if I don't get off to-night I shall kill myself, and I would far rather you—you

benefited by my diamonds than my cousin Joe, who would of course have them otherwise. Don't you understand?"

"Your late experiences have made you morbid. Rely on me, I shall keep your necklace for the present, and I won't let you out of my sight until you are under my aunt's roof. I shall follow you to the restaurant, and remember we are strangers. Meanwhile, as I see the most of the men returning to their places, for prudence sake, I must go now. Rely on me. You are as safe from your cousin Joe now as if you were sitting in my aunt's drawing-room. The only thing you have to do is to keep cool. I undertake the rest."

Captain Halford departed in the nick of time; two minutes later the box-door swung open with a violence that threatened its hinges; and Joe, two shades redder in the face than when he had gone out to "smoke," staggered in and sank into a chair as if he was extremely glad to come to anchor.

"Well, and how have you been getting on? he asked, for he had better control over his speech than his limbs. "Not found it too dull in my absence, have you?"

"No, not at all," I replied, cheerfully.

"Ah! that's right. People still staring away as hard as ever, I see. No end of fellows came up to me just now to know who you were, and where you got the diamonds, and all sorts of questions."

"Yes; and what did you say?"

"Well, I said," hitching himself forward, and throwing his arm across the back of my chair, "that you were my future 'missus,' and that the diamonds were part of the spoil of Delhi, and presented to my Uncle John, who was no end of a swell in the East—a kind of prince."

"Was one part of your story as true as the other?" I said, recoiling from him sideways.

"It was, my angel!"

I glanced down and saw that Captain Halford's opera glasses were fixed on our box, and focussed on my detested companion. Of course Joe naturally attributed all notice now to my diamonds, and anyone could stare with impunity.

"I wish, Joe, you would keep to your own place, and not squeeze me into a corner! I want to see the play and hear what the actors are saying, so please don't talk!" and I turned my head and devoted my attention to the stage. All the same, I scarcely remember a single thing about the piece, and I do not think I heard a word of what the actors were saying. All the time I was asking myself, How am I to give Joe the slip? How am I to escape from Joe?

It was now nearly eleven o'clock. In another hour I would know my fate for bad or good. I would either be free, or Joe's bond-servant and prisoner once more under that hateful roof in Paradise place!

All things, bad or good, come to an end; and, at length, after what seemed to me an interminable time, the curtain fell for the last time, and everyone got up and made what seemed to me a regular stampede out of the theatre. One would have thought it was a race as to who could depart first.

Joe, who had been dozing, now aroused himself, and was very much awake, and I had hardly time to bestow a significant signal on my confederate in the stalls ere we also decamped and hurried down to the portico. We were immediately joined by Miss De Montmorency, Mr. Talbot, and another couple, presumably, Nellie and Fraser; and after a good deal of loud discussion it was arranged that Joe and Miss Montgomery and I should go in one cab, and the other three would follow us in another, to "The Golden Rose."

It was no great distance off, and as we alighted I noticed that we were closely followed by a hansom cab and smoking horse, which drew up with a sudden jerk just behind us, and two gentlemen sprang out. One was Captain Halford, the other a stranger to me—a man with a fat, round, clean-shaven face, and merry blue eyes.

"Hullo, Joe, old boy!" he exclaimed, giving him a resounding slap on the back. "So you are coming to supper here, too! Miss Montgomery," bowing, "your most devoted slave. My friend and I are going to have a few oysters and a bottle of 'cham,' which I would ask you to share with us only I know that you are so much better engaged."

"I say, old chappie!" said Joe, "you come and join our party. The more the merrier, and you can add your champagne and oysters to the feast. You may as well—eh?"

"Yes! we may as well!" turning to Captain Halford.

"This is Mr. Joe Manners, who has kindly invited us to supper!" here Captain Halford bowed in a deferential manner.

"Invited you to supper, and to bring your own oysters and champagne!" added the girl called Nellie, with a shriek of laughter.

"Yes. I'm Joe Manners, at your service!" said Joe, ignoring this little speech. "And this is my cousin, Miss Manners!" laying his hand on my shoulder.

Captain Halford looked at me gravely, and bowed once more.

"These ladies," continued Joe, "are Miss Montmorency and Miss Nellie Dancer, of the Cockatoo Theatre, and these gentlemen are my good friends, Fraser and Talbot, and now everyone knows everyone, I believe. Let us all be jolly and comfortable. We must have a private room, of course; and I say, waiter!" he shouted, "get six dozen of the best natives, and put them down to Mr. Tanner. Tanner, my boy, you must pay for your company?"

"Only too proud!" said Mr. Tanner, with evident delight.

After this, we—eight people in all—trouped upstairs to a room almost lined with looking-glasses, where a supper-table was laid out with great taste.

At this supper-table we were presently all seated. I between Joe and Captain Halford, who had dexterously manoeuvred himself into the place on my left hand.

The ladies took off their gloves, and everyone—except myself—set to work to demolish Mr. Tanner's oysters with immense appreciation.

After the oysters champagne, then soup, then more champagne. The conversation now waxed very vivacious. The men talked boisterously, the ladies screamed with laughter.

Then we had lobster mayonnaise, and fowl and ham, and, of course, champagne.

I was really quite startled to notice the number of times some of the people had their glasses replenished—even the two ladies!

Then someone told a good story. Then one of the men sang a song. More soup—more stories followed. They provoked great rapping on the table, roars of laughter and applause, but I was too ignorant to see the wit in them. To me things were one and all high Dutch—which, perhaps, was just as well—for I noticed that Captain Halford looked both angry and uncomfortable. He talked to me (for Joe's benefit) about the play and about the weather, and music. Was I fond of music? There was a piano in the other room—a room which opened out of the one we were supping in, and its folding doors stood wide open.

"Will you come over and try the piano?" he said.

"Yes, if you like!" I answered, rather reluctantly. "But I don't play much!"

Both he and I very well knew that I could not play at all!

"Joe!" I said, turning to Joe—who was what is known as "happy"—"it's so hot in here! I am going into the other room with this gentleman!"

"All right!—all right! We will all come in just now. We are only waiting for Tanner's song! Tanner, strike up!"

Tanner accordingly did strike up such a capital comic ditty that our departure was

scarcely noticed, and we strolled very slowly into the adjoining room, in full view of the company save of Joe, who sat with his back to the open door.

There was a door in the next room at one side rather out of sight, and not commanded by anyone at the table—which was lucky.

"We must try to keep near the door," whispered Captain Halford. "But first take off your necklace, and put it in your pocket." This I did. "Then come to the piano to keep up appearances. I'll play; and he stooped over the keys and struck up a lively air, that nearly drowned the comic song.

"Oh! shut up there at the piano," shouted some one at the supper-table.

I turned cautiously and looked round; they were all in ecstatic delight over Mr. Tanner's song. Mr. Tanner, facing us, looked less jovial than anxious.

Joe, with his back to us, was loudly rapping on the table with the handle of his fork, and shouting, "Bravo! bravo!" The others were equally loud and excited.

"Now is our time! Tanner will give them an encore, and we shall get five minutes' start," whispered Captain Halford, as he lounged near to the door; then he cautiously opened it, and nodded to me. I went out on tiptoe, and then rushed downstairs like some wild animal who has regained its liberty.

"I say! I say! Not so fast!" remonstrated my companion, breathlessly. "You will have all the waiters after you, thinking you are a thief! Walk very slowly through the vestibule, as if you were rather sorry to leave than otherwise. I have a hansom waiting."

With difficulty I managed to control my eagerness, and to carry out his instructions so well, that we strolled past the waiters in a most natural fashion, and Captain Halford said to one of them,—

"The rest of the party will be down immediately. This lady is tired, and is going home. Tell Mr. Manners that he need not be anxious about us. [It is all right.]

"Very well, sir," said the waiter. "Is this your cab?"

It was. In another second I had scrambled in, followed by Captain Halford. The door was closed with a bang. The horse's hoofs clattered on the stones, and we were off.

"That's all right," said my companion, with a long sigh of relief. "Hark! They miss us already!"

Sure enough, out of the second floor window, now wide open, hung Joe's portly person yelling after us,—

"Stop them! Stop them!"

"Cabby," said Captain Halford through the little opening. "Double, if we are followed, and as you have a good horse, go like smoke. You shall have something like a fare for your pains. But we must not be caught, or there will be a row."

"All right, sir!" returned the cabby; "but there's a very smart horse was standing at the door. If they get hold of him in time, it will put me to the pin of my collar to shake him off."

"Then make the most of your start," said Captain Halford, ere shutting up the opening. "Go round and across the Park, and lead them a nice dance." Then turning to me he quoted,—

"There was racing and chasing on Canobie Lea, But the lost bride of Netherby ne'er did they see."

"I managed pretty well, did I not?"

"Splendidly. Fancy getting asked to supper, and sitting next me!"

"Yes, that was all Tanner's idea. He is a capital fellow, and knows everyone, even to your rascally cousin, whom he says is a well-known bad lot. Tanner is a sort of Bohemian himself, and knows lots of queer people. For once his odd acquaintances have been of great use to me."

"Where are you taking me to I asked, after a pause.

"To my aunt's, Mrs. Halford's, in Mowbray-street. She will look after you."

"But I am only a stranger to her, and she will be so surprised, seeing meat such an hour and without a hat or jacket. Would it not be better to take me to Peggy?"

"No, for of course he knows Peggy's address from your letter. Best go to my aunt's at first. She is a stiff, prim old lady, rather grand in her ideas; but don't you be the least afraid of her, and she will do anything for me."

"I am afraid of her. What you say makes me tremble. I am quaking at the thought of our meeting. How long will it take us to get there?"

"Not twenty minutes if we drove straight from the restaurant; but you see we have to amble and twist more like a hare than a hansom, to shake off any pursuit."

"Do you think they are after us?" I gasped.

"I fancy so—I'll ask cabby. Cabby," to the driver, "how goes it?"

"Badly enough; they are hunting us down; gaining too. The other driver is as sharp as us, and may no doubt have been well bribed."

"And has his horse the legs of this one?"

"He has. He is clean thoroughbred, last out of a racing stable the other day!"

"Well, make for the Park as hard as ever you can, and when you get there slacken and let us out and drive on. Let them overtake you, and find the birds flown, and when they are off the track do you come back and pick us up. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, not a bad dodge that," said cabby, with enthusiasm, now entering into the spirit of the chase, and starting forward faster than ever. In a very short time we dashed through the Marble Arch and straight on towards Hyde Park Corner. A short way across he slackened and we got out hastily, and ran to the side next Park-lane—out into Park-lane—where the wall and railings entirely concealed us from any followers.

It was a light summer's night, and we had scarcely taken up our position, and I was still panting from my recent run, when I saw another hansom tear through the Marble Arch, and down the drive at a gallop in pursuit of ours. The glass was open, and I distinctly saw Joe and one of his friends. He was shaking a stick, and shouting, and evidently urging the driver to renewed exertions. The sight of his fury and the mere sound of his voice made my very blood run cold, and as I looked and listened I was obliged to grasp the iron railings for support. A strange-looking couple the policeman must have thought us as he marched past on his beat—I especially—with no hat or outdoor wrap, my yellow looks falling rather loosely on my shoulders, and both of us standing staring eagerly into the empty Park.

He stared at us critically. I suppose my companion's appearance satisfied him that we were not belonging to the class of law-breakers, for he passed on in silence, and never ordered us "to move on." Presently our hansom came rattling back.

"Is the coast clear?" inquired my companion eagerly, approaching it alone, and leaving me in the shade.

"As clear as day. They are on a fine false scent now, after a hansom and a couple of gentlemen that's going to the Strand. That was an elegant plant of yours, sir; and that there party as was after us, when he found I was empty, laws, how he did swear! I never heard the like not on the cab rank. Where to now?"

"Upper Mowbray-street."

"All right, sir," and away we went.

(To be continued.)

THE word liberty has been falsely used by persons who, being degenerate in private life and mischievous in public, had no hope left but in fomenting discord.

A TRUE REVENGE.

—O—

CHAPTER VI.

LORD GRAYDON'S home was one of the oldest in the county. It was not so picturesque as some of the places of later date were, with their lofty towers and turreted roofs; but the young heir loved the quaint style of the Queen Anne building, and would not have one thing altered.

If there were any repairs he gave strict injunctions to keep up the old style, and so it stood, quaint, ancient and pure in its antiquity, surrounded by chestnuts, alders, and pines.

Far as the eye could reach, and farther still, stretched the land over which Lord Graydon was ruler. A park of immense size, in which the deer browsed, lifting their graceful antlered heads timidly at the approach of footsteps, led from the house on the right-hand side, and here Lord Graydon was walking one morning, some two or three weeks after the ball, reading a letter, the contents of which seemed to puzzle him not a little.

An expression, half doubt, half hope, rested on his fair, handsome face, as he coned the lines over and over again, pausing at last in deep thought beneath the cool shelter of a giant chestnut.

"The immaculate creature is going the pace now," he read aloud in his surprise and wonder. "Who the woman is no one knows, but she is beautiful enough to tempt St. Anthony himself. He spends all his time at her house in St. John's-wood, and when not there is invisible to all his friends. It looks like a case—eh, old boy?"

He raised his head with a proud, haughty gesture, as he saw some words farther down the closely written page, and over his face passed a look of keen disdain.

"No," he muttered through his set teeth. "I will not play the part of informer; if she hears, it shall not be through my instrumentality. Everything comes to those who wait! and I shall see him unmasked if what Frank tells me be true."

Lord Graydon crushed the letter in his hand, and was about to throw it into a little running stream, but by a sudden impulse he drew his hand back, and carefully pressing the creases from the paper he folded it and placed it in his pocket.

"Who knows? I may want it," was his unuttered thought, as he wandered on under the trees, thinking over Gabriel's strange behaviour, for it was of Gabriel Vane his friend he spoke.

A thousand thoughts, hopes and fears ran riot in his mind, though his face did not show this. If Gabriel were really proved unworthy might not his dream yet be realised?

He knew Una's proud, passionate nature well, and felt that a suspicion of unfaithfulness upon the lover's part would be enough to break the bonds that now bound them.

But George Lord Graydon had a high sense of honour, and not even to attain his highest ambition would he breathe a word to the detriment of his rival.

"Strange!" he soliloquised; "it must be merely a brief infatuation he has conceived for this woman, for he appeared to idolise the very ground Una trod upon."

"Good-morning, Lord Graydon!" cried a rich, clear voice, and looking up with a start, he saw Una and Ianthe standing before him in the warm sunlight.

A great throb of joy shook him as he gazed at Una's dark, glowing face and splendid form. What if, after all, this beauty and grace should become his own? This thrill of sweet hope irradiated his handsome, boyish face as he went swiftly forward with outstretched hand, bending over the beautiful coquette till his breath stirred the soft hair on her temples.

"What good fairy wafted you here?" he asked, as he turned to Ianthe, taking in with

a quick, keen glance, the sad change in that lovely face, lovelier now than ever, but with a beauty that spoke of the angel-land to which it was quite evident she was travelling, though her father and aunt strove to hide it from each other.

"Auntie was going to see Lady Carroll, and so when we neared the village of Graydon, we asked to be put down for a walk. Auntie will call for us," replied Ianthe, in that sweet voice grown so low and gentle of late, while a sad swiftly fading smile lighted her features for a moment.

Una, who did not seem to notice the alteration in her cousin, as we must still call her, laughed brightly as she tapped Lord Graydon playfully with the fan she wore at her side.

"Yes, and I feel almost inclined to say I hope she will come soon, for in spite of your complimentary remark, I am sure you are not pleased!" she cried, seeing the cloud that passed over his face as he noticed how his sweet girl-friend was fading away from life.

"Indeed, I am!" he exclaimed quickly. "And you know it, fair Una," he added, so softly that only she heard, and feeling that she had spoken too rashly, she flushed and drew back, though a feeling of pride set her heart beating, stirring the filmy lace on the bosom of the pink morning robe, and sending a richer colour to the creamy cheeks.

"Can it be possible that she loves Gabriel?" Ianthe asked herself, as she watched the girl's face flushing and changing at Lord Graydon's words. She could not understand the different emotions that swayed the heart of this strangely organised woman.

How one moment she longed with a passionate wild longing for a glimpse of her lover's face; how the next she was filled with scorn of herself for being so weak as to let love stand in the light of ambition!

"You are very quiet, *ma belle*," said Una, turning to the girl as she stood under the shade of the pale green tree, with dreamy violet eyes gazing far away into distance.

"I am like the raven," replied Ianthe, looking up with a smile.

Una glanced quickly into her face, feeling the *double entendre* in the quiet words; but Ianthe had spoken them almost mechanically, and so her face was perfectly unconscious, and Una breathed a sigh of relief.

They had reached the borders of the park by this time, their progress being stopped by a clear, narrow stream. A bridge had been thrown across it farther up, but neither felt inclined to walk that distance, and so they seated themselves on a bench under an old oak.

They sat very silent for some time, the gentle splash of the water amongst the tall reeds mingling pleasantly with the murmur of the wind through the long branches of the trees. The soft "crish, crish" of the deer cropping the grass sounded close to their ears, and the tinkle of a sheep-bell came across the river.

Ianthe rose and walked away to a spot farther down, where a little cluster of starry forget-me-nots showed palely blue against the deep green of the grass.

She stooped and gathered a bunch, gazing tenderly, dreamily at them, as she placed them in her dress, and then she stood perfectly still, with down-dropped, clasped hands, large misty eyes fixed upon the rippling stream, and parted coral lips, while the breeze played softly through the feathery, golden hair, lifting it gently from the blue-veined, rounded temples, to let the sunlight glint among its bright curls.

A beautiful, rare picture she made as she stood there in her unconscious grace; a picture such as Guido would have loved to paint, was that pure girlish face with its saintly, half-listening expression.

"Your cousin is growing very beautiful, too beautiful for strength," remarked Lord Graydon, catching sight of Ianthe through the swaying branch of a tree.

Una's face flushed at his words, and the proud scarlet lips curled disdainfully.

"She would be rarely beautiful if she had more life in her—more nerve," she replied, calmly; but her eyes told her jealousy. "I do not care for the expression on her face at the present moment," she added.

A pained look crept into the young man's eyes. He did not like to see this ungenerous trait in Una's character. It hurt him. Surely she, in possession of such great beauty, could afford to acknowledge it in another.

"That peaceful calmness is what I am alluding to, Miss Raye," he returned. "There is more of heaven than earth in your cousin's face, and I believe in her heart. I, too, could wish that she had more spirit in her, though it would take away some of her beauty; but it would be more natural."

"Do you think she is ill?" inquired Una, carelessly, toying with the jewelled handle of her fan.

"Yes," he said, promptly; then, seeing the slightly bored expression that was stealing over her perfect features he remarked, by way of changing the subject, "have you heard from Gabriel Varne yet?"

"No," she replied, feeling slightly annoyed that he should ask her. "Why do you ask?"

"I had no particular motive," he said, flushing. "I merely thought that as he had been gone some time he must have written."

"He has not done so!" answered the girl; and Lord Graydon saw by the tightening of the red lips, and the ominous darkening of the large eyes, that Gabriel was in bad odour with his fiancée even now. What would she say if she could only know the contents of the letter in his pocket?

"Shall we join your cousin?" he observed, rising.

He felt that he was treading upon dangerous ground, and that it would be wiser to put temptation out of his way. He was not quite master of himself in her presence; her beauty fascinated him, taking away all more sensible feelings, and so he felt it was best to put it out of his power to forget honour by joining Ianthe.

"Certainly," said Una, haughtily. "I was wondering why we were sitting here at all, for Aunt Isobel must be waiting for us up at the house."

"Miss Raye tells me that Miss Weir must be waiting for you," said George, as he came up to the spot where Ianthe was standing. "I am truly sorry to have been guilty of such a piece of rudeness to her."

"Oh! indeed, Lord Graydon, Una has made a mistake; auntie will not be here until one, and it is now five-and-twenty minutes to one," returned Ianthe, taking out a tiny enamelled watch as she spoke.

"I did not take much notice of the time auntie said she would come," remarked Una, in apparent indifference; "I judged by the length of time that I felt we had been here."

Lord Graydon was not man of the world enough to read beneath the surface, and so it was with a choking feeling in his throat that he turned away, walking a little in advance of the two girls. She had found the time long. He always did make a fool of himself in her company.

As they came in sight of the house they saw the carriage containing Miss Weir bowling along the broad sweep immediately fronting the terrace, and Lord Graydon went forward, saying as he lifted his hat,—

"I am indeed glad to see you looking so well, Miss Weir, but I regret that my mother is not at home."

"Oh, pray don't worry about that," cried Miss Weir, "I did not intend calling, only the girls wanted a walk, so I sent them on here."

"And a very pleasant walk we have had too!" cried Ianthe; "we have been down by the river, auntie."

Miss Weir nodded approvingly as her niece spoke, and her kind, grey eyes grew moist with the sorrow that was always present, though kept in the background.

"Will you come back with us, Lord Graydon?" asked Miss Isobel Weir, and he, knowing that it was no empty compliment but a hearty invitation, accepted, and jumping into the carriage after them, he called out to someone in the hall,—

"Jacobs, tell the mater that I shall not be back to lunch!"

And then the carriage bowed swiftly and lightly along, down the wide avenue bordered by softly murmuring trees, that cast such queer, fanciful shadows on the fair green sward, out through the great iron gates, beside which was a little lodge over whose flat slate roof the wild rose and honeysuckle struggled for the pre-eminence, sending out sweet puffs of perfume on the balmy air with each soft breeze, and so into the straight, white country road, with its grassy banks bright with wild blossoms, and the air was filled with the gay sweet song of birds.

"The earth is very fair," thought Ianthe, a sweet sadness falling over her face as her soul devoured the exquisite beauty of the morning. The sheen of water, lying so calm and still in the sunlight in the distance, the pure green undulating land near, and softly curved rounded hills, on whose sides the cattle grazed, looking down with sleepy eyes at the passer-by.

Graydon village lay to their right, an old fashioned, quaint place, where most of the cottages had thatched roofs; each cottage had its own piece of ground filled with homely, sweet-smelling flowers. There the old women would sit in the evenings in their brown dresses and white caps, chatting with their wearied husbands, while they knitted winter stockings for the little ones.

Only an occasional glimpse of the white-washed walls of these peaceful dwellings was visible through the clustering trees as they drove along, and presently they left the village behind them.

"And I might be mistress over all this," was the thought that came almost unbidden to Una's mind, "Gabriel has not written. Can he care for me as he ought?"

So the tempter whispered in her ear, and the words rankled and rankled in her heart. Ah! Gabriel Varne, love has indeed been thy foe. Una's manner was so gracious to Lord Graydon as they sat side by side at luncheon, that, as he rode home, he looked up at the blue sky, saying, with a look of determination on his boyish face,—

"I will find out if Gabriel is really playing a double game, and if he is, I will checkmate him!"

CHAPTER VII.

LONDON in August, the hot sun glaring down on the great stone buildings along Pall-mall, and on the dry pavements, that seemed to send a glow of heat up into the faces of the weary pedestrians. Not a breath of cool air; no shade excepting beneath an occasional awning, and here the crowd was so intense, that the blinding rays of the sun were preferable.

Only in the squares, now looking brown and parched, was there shade; the pleasant shade of wide-spreading trees, under whose branches the tired wanderers might lie, unmolested, and listen drowsily, with closed eyes, to the soft, low laughter of women, mingled with the shrill treble of children.

From one of the clubs in Pall-mall a tall, erect figure issued, pausing irresolute on the steps, and gazing down the long line of carriages and other vehicles, as though not quite aware what to do. He stood thus for a moment, and then with a gesture as of having settled a knotty question, he walked quickly down the steps, crossed the road, and then walked at a more leisurely pace towards the park gates.

As he slowly sauntered over the gravel path towards the friendly shade of the trees, a man caught sight of him through the park railings, gave a sudden start, and passed with an

exclamation of surprise, and at the same time a tall, splendidly proportioned figure approached from an opposite direction. It was the figure of a woman over forty, and the face, rich in beauty, was yet marred by lines of care and passion.

The woman paused as she neared the man and waited, a look of eager, hungry anxiety in her great black eyes, while a hectic colour flushed her hollowed cheeks.

Lord Graydon—for it was he who had started and paused, on beholding that tall familiar form walking in the park—had entered, and taken a seat under the shadow of a chestnut, where he could see all that passed, though he could hear nothing.

He watched eagerly to see how the man would greet the woman, and a flush stained his handsome face as he saw a smile light up the man's stern dark features.

"Gabriel Varne," he muttered, "are you indeed the villain your actions paint you?"

Over the woman's face there flashed a look of delight, and as she glanced swiftly up into Gabriel's face, a strange sense, as of having seen that face before, stirred Lord Graydon.

Where had he seen it? He strove to think, but memory was shy and would not come to his aid, and so he banished the thought from his mind. It came back to him in the after days, and he knew then why he felt that strange thrill pass through him at sight of this woman with the beautiful, passionate, sin-marred face.

Gabriel's features were set and stern, as he answered the woman's questions, which she put with quick nervous gestures, that told of foreign birth, and of long residence in a foreign land. She seemed to be arguing with Gabriel, and he to be pleading for some boon, which she was unable or unwilling to grant, and once he turned away impatiently, as though with the intention of leaving her.

She made a step forward, laying one slender hand on his arm, gazing up into his face with that smile that seemed so oddly familiar to Lord Graydon, lingering round her full red lips, while she murmured something in a rich low voice that was wafted to Lord Graydon on the breeze, making him start again with its familiarity; and as she spoke that rare sweet smile broke over Gabriel's face, and he clasped her hand as though in gratitude, and then they both turned and walked away together.

Lord Graydon watched them as they walked on, their forms now and again disappearing behind a clump of bushes, then becoming visible in the open, till finally they were hidden from view by the trees on the border of the lake.

"Seeing is believing, so the saying is," muttered George, "and yet it is hard to believe a man can be so base."

George was young in the world's ways, or he would have known that there is no limit to the baseness of some men, where there is an end to be attained by crime.

He stood gazing vacantly over the trees, at the pretty bridge that spanned the water, his thoughts far away, and so it was with a shock he became aware of the presence of another well-known figure, the figure of Farmer Gray, standing with pale, working features and horror-stricken eyes in the pathway, a few yards from the spot where Gabriel had held his tryst.

What was Farmer Gray doing here in the park at this hour? What, indeed, had brought him to London!—at a time when he was needed at home to gather in the harvest? Ah! what indeed had called him hither?

There was a wild look about him that startled the young man, and he moved forward a few steps, with the intention of speaking to him, and asking if he could be of any service; but as his footsteps fell upon the farmer's ear, he turned and gazed at him a moment in silence, then he waved him back with a quick, imperious gesture, and Lord Graydon, unconsciously feeling awed by the

grandeur of that rugged, sunburnt face, now pale with agony, paused.

The old farmer's lips moved, but for a few seconds no sound issued from them; then his voice, low and hoarse, broke the painful silence,—

"I am in no humour for the company of my fellow-creatures. The ghost of the past has risen up to render my last days more bitter than my first. Stay, my lord; do not speak of this meeting to anyone!"

And with these enigmatical words he turned and tottered away, with hands outspread and moving lips, in the same direction that Gabriel and his beautiful companion had gone, leaving Lord Graydon standing as one stupefied under the shade of the tree.

"What, in Heaven's name, is the meaning of this?" he cried, taking off his hat and passing his hand through his curly hair. "First, I come upon Gabriel meeting a woman secretly in the park, then I meet the old farmer raving about the ghost of the past, and looking as if he had lost his senses."

He turned away and passed with halting step out of the park, walking like one in a dream along the crowded streets till he arrived at Trafalgar-square. Here he came to a standstill. He had only come up to London to transact some business, and it was quite an accident that took him near the park. There were not many of his friends in London now, and he did not quite know what to do with himself.

"I think I'll take a run up to Aunt Agatha's," he said aloud, after standing on the kerbstone for about five minutes, and having come to this determination, he hailed a passing hansom and jumped in, giving the order Park-lane as he took his seat. He dismissed the cab at the corner and walked slowly up Park-lane, pausing at length at the gateway of a square, white house with a covered verandah, and tall, green bushes that completely hid the lower windows from the view of passers-by.

A tall footman with enormous legs and an evident belief in his own importance answered Lord Graydon's summons, and informed him that his aunt and cousins were at home.

"Why, George! whatever has brought you to London at this time of the year?" exclaimed his aunt, a slight, fair old lady with a pretty pink complexion and bright blue eyes.

"I had to come up to see Johnson about those new cottages we are having built, and so, as I was here, I thought I would have a look at you," he replied. "Where is Aggie?" he added.

"Here she is, you naughty boy, waiting until your lordship will deign to glance her way," cried a merry voice; and a young girl, the very counterpart of the old lady, stepped out from behind the heavy curtains.

"You should not hide away if you are so anxious for my notice," he replied, with a laugh.

"Conceited as ever, I perceive," she remarked, tapping his arm with her fan. "Are you engaged yet?" she added, looking with big interested eyes at her tall cousin, who flushed and turned slightly away from her close scrutiny as he answered,—

"No, not yet."

"Then you are in love!" she said, with a triumphant glance at his tell-tale face. "Who is she? Is she pretty? I am sure she is dark. Come, George, tell me what is your lady-love like?"

"My dear Aggie, what a torrent! My head is in a whirl!" he cried, putting his hands to his ears.

"You are a nasty, horrid thing!" she replied, pointing her cherry lips. "Oh! by-the-bye," she added, "who do you think I saw in the Row the other day?"

"I am sure I cannot guess. I'm not reckoned at all a good hand at that kind of thing," he returned, languidly.

"Gabriel Varne, and he was riding beside a carriage occupied by one of the loveliest women I have ever seen! They left the Row

together. Fancy grave, book-wormish Gabriel Varne succumbing to the charms of a woman!"

"Who is she? What is she like?" exclaimed her cousin, rising hastily from the lounge he had dropped on to.

"Oh! you are going to ask a hundred questions at once now," laughed the girl, maliciously. "I do not know who she is, but she is tall and commanding in figure, and has the most lovely face, great dark eyes, olive skin, and masses of black hair. She is not young, for she must be quite forty-five!"

Lord Graydon bit his lips and muttered under his breath something not at all complimentary to Gabriel Varne. It was evidently the same woman he had seen him meet; the same woman which his friend had spoken of in that letter, which he from a sense of honour had refrained from mentioning to Una.

Honour! was it right or honourable to leave Una in ignorance of her lover's perfidy? and yet he could not be the one to break the news to her. How could he possibly say to her, "Your lover has proved himself a villain, will you have me?" For that was what it amounted to.

No, he was tied by honour, and how the cords were to be cut he knew not, and with a clouded brow and a far-off, brooding expression, new to him, in his blue eyes, he held out his hand to his aunt.

"What! going?" she said, in surprise.

"Yes, aunt," he replied, quietly; "I only just called to see how you and Aggie were getting along, stived up here in all this heat."

"It is a great shame that your uncle should be kept dawdling about by those horrid members," returned his aunt. "Well, good-bye, George! remember me to your mother," she added.

"Good-bye, George," echoed his cousin, very quietly. Deep down in her girlish heart she cherished a little remembrance of childish days when he had called her his little sweetheart; and having as yet met no one who had claimed her love she felt a little sore on that point, and he seemed to have forgotten it utterly. Well, perhaps it was best, and she heaved a sigh that did not sound quite broken-hearted.

"Master takes it as an insult that you do not come down to our place sometimes," remarked George, as he stood at the foot of the steps drawing on his gloves. "Why don't you persuade aunt to come, Aggie? I know your persuasive powers are irresistible."

"I know that you have not found it so, Master George Flatterer," retorted Aggie, with a blush. "Still I will try my best. I should like to see dear Ianthe again, and Una. I wrote to her to-day! That reminds me; Mr. Varne will get nicely teased when he goes back to his estate."

"Why?" asked Lord Graydon, looking up at her as if that name had not sent all the blood to his brain in a wild, vengeful rush.

"Because I could not resist telling the news of Gabriel Varne's love affair," was the reply.

Agatha Vernon little knew what caused that look to leap to his eyes; she only felt her foolish heart give a little jump as his hand closed gently on hers, and his voice, very low but tender, said,—

"Mind you come to Graydon, and I will drive you over to Wood Lodge myself, and you shall tell the girls the gossip of the day."

"I will make mamma come," she cried, with a laugh, shaking her brown, curly head at him as he turned and waved his hand ere he closed the gate.

"The Fates are propitious," thought the young heir of Graydon, as he sauntered along under the shade of the overhanging trees. "Whoever would have dreamed of Aggie writing the condemning tidings? Gabriel Varne, 'your sin has found you out!'"

Meanwhile old Farmer Gray, tottering along in the golden sunlight, now pausing with gasping breath and mumbling lips, staring about him with wild, dark grey eyes, now starting forward as though some inward spirit goaded him on, and anon sinking on to a seat, where

he stayed for some minutes with bowed head, and hands hanging limp and helpless at his side, had only reached the gates near Whitehall.

He stood still, gazing about at the hurrying pedestrians and ever-rolling line of vehicles with a dazed expression on his rugged features, and many turned to obtain a second view of that pallid face, with the nervous, twitching lips and the deeply-set grey eyes, glancing out weirdly from beneath their heavy, overhanging brows.

A few street arabs gathered round with a view to having some fun, and one boy stared hard at the old man's vacant face for a moment, then, with the remark "He's drunk," walked off, swishing the railings with a long leather strap, and whistling "Those Golden Slippers."

The old farmer gradually awoke to the fact that he was becoming an object of attention to the passers-by, and drawing his scattered senses together he crossed the road and pursued his way.

As he stood still at the corner of the Strand, waiting to cross the road, he saw two figures on the opposite side of the way, and a change, terrible in its wild, pitiful anguish, came over the already haggard face.

"Yes, Gabriel's words are true! Oh, Heaven! how can I—"

His words were cut short by a policeman grasping him by the arm and dragging him back on to the pavement, for in his excitement he had walked out into the road amongst the crowd of horses and carts.

"I see you are new to London," observed the policeman, good-naturedly; but the farmer took no heed of him or his words. His eyes were fixed on those two figures walking slowly but surely out of his sight along the Strand.

"Cannot I get across now?" he asked, impatiently, as he lost sight of them for a moment, and the policeman led him to the kerb on the opposite side, standing still a second to watch the movements of the "queer country-man."

Farmer Gray walked on with steadier steps now; but he was unaccustomed to a crowd, and got terribly jostled, losing sight of those two figures now and again, but always keeping near.

They had just reached Wellington-street when they were compelled to stand while a long file of carts and carriages moved slowly up the street.

This gave the farmer his opportunity, and pressing forward, he gained their side even as the road became passable.

But the old man was desperate, and putting out his hand he laid it upon the man's arm as he was about to slip across the gutter.

"Gabriel Varne!" he said, in low, hoarse tones, "I have come at your bidding!"

(To be continued.)

THE OCEAN'S BED.—The bed of the ocean is to an enormous extent covered with lava and pumice stone. Still more remarkable is it to find the floor of the ocean covered in many parts with the dust of the meteorites. These bodies whirl about in the heavens like miniature comets, and are for the most part broken into innumerable fragments. We are all familiar with the heavenly visitants as shooting stars, but it has been only lately discovered that this cosmic dust forms layers at the bottom of the deepest seas. Between Honolulu and Tahiti, at the depth of two thousand three hundred and fifty fathoms, over two miles and a half, a vast layer of this material exists. Falling upon land this impalpable dust is undistinguishable; but in accumulating for centuries in the sea depths it forms a wondrous story of continuous bombardment of this planet by cometary bodies.

SUMMER COURTSHIP.

—o—

WHEN in the dell
I whispered Nell
About my heart's devotion,
She raised her eyes
In sweet surprise
And pointed to the ocean.

"Like yonder waves,
From ocean caves,
Men change," she said, in sorrow;
"In wildwood shade
Some other maid
Will hear this tale to-morrow."

"Ah! no," I cried
"My love shall bide
Forever and forever;
The stars may fail—
The sun may pale—
But my devotion, never."

Her bright eyes shine,
Her blush divine
Dispels all former sorrow,
"I'm yours," she sighed,
"Whate'er betide,
How sweet will be love's morrow!"

Can we forget
Our hands have met
Amid the sunset glory?
That lips and eyes,
Without disguise,
Have told the old, old story?

Oh, summer sweet,
With flying feet,
She goes, and who shall find her?
But many a joy,
Without alloy,
Dear Nell, she leaves behind her.

That trysting, dear,
Was not this year;
Yet we remember sweetly,
The very spot
Where we forgot
The whole world so completely.

Our wedding bells!
Sweet wedding bells!
Without a note of sorrow,
Our story told,
So new, so old,
Ten years ago to-morrow.

M. A. K.

A LITTLE GUST.

—o—

MISS PARTHENIA CROSBY tied her sorrel pony into his stable, pulled down a bundle of hay for him, gathered up her riding-skirt and strolled into the house.

She looked about her with widely-opened black eyes. To a young lady, who, until four months before, had looked off every day at a misty, grey spur of the Mendips, there was a novel fascination in knowing that the creek winding through the adjoining farm—there was not another house in sight—would find its way finally, by a crooked course, into the Trent itself. There was a novel fascination in everything because everything was a couple of hundred miles from home.

Miss Crosby sauntered up the long broad-walk and in at the kitchen door.

A young woman, with dark eyes and a fresh colour like her own, gave her a nod over the manly garments she was mending; and a tall young man, with a boyish, good-humoured face and a certain loose-jointedness, got up from his chair hastily and snatched off the hat which he had not hitherto removed.

Miss Parthenia looked at him with a sparkling brightness. Perhaps there was a shade of mockery in the smile which turned up the corners of her well-cut mouth and displayed a dimple in her pink cheek. And, indeed, if Joel Simmons was not positively awkward,

there was a modest shyness about him at which a self-possessed and rather airy young lady might not unreasonably smile.

"Where have you been, Par?" said the young woman, commencing on another patch briskly. "Joel has been waiting two hours."

Joel blushed. Parthenia sank into a chair collectedly, tossed her masculine-looking little hat on to the table, patted her roughened hair, and gave a jerk to the folds of her dress.

Even when one's affections are by no means concerned, it is not necessary that one should look like a fright.

"Where have I been?" said Parthenia. "Over to Ashbourne and right down the Derby Road."

The young man laughed, with his shy, blue eyes fixed admiringly upon her.

"If I'd known you were going," he said, "I'd have taken flipper and gone along."

Parthenia gave him a little smile and bow. "There would have been three of us," she observed. "Mr. Moretown overlook me at Ashbourne, and left me at the gate."

She looked at the toe of her shoe.

Joel blushed again—this time hotly and painfully. He kept his eyes on her blooming, young face in a worried way, but he did not attempt to speak.

"Joel came down, Par," said her sister (there was a shade of entreaty in her tone), "to see when you want to go over to Dovedale."

"Dovedale!" said Parthenia, lightly. "Mr. Moretown was speaking of it. 'He's going to bring his trap round this afternoon and take me over.'"

She got up and fluttered about aimlessly for a moment; it might have been to escape the young man's hurt and harassed gaze.

Then she went into the pantry adjoining, and came out with a bowl of vivid red apples. She did not find her caller; he had taken an abrupt departure.

She burst into pretty high-pitched laughter.

"Oh, Sally," she cried, gaspingly, "I never shall get used to your Midland customs!"

"Par," said her sister, soberly, "it's high time you behaved yourself. Joel's meek enough, goodness knows, where you're concerned; but he won't stand everything."

Parthenia raised her brows, and bit into an apple.

"Par," said her sister, with a quick alarm, "you don't mean to say—you don't—that you really enjoy that wretched little Moretown?"

"Mr. Moretown is a very pleasant person," Parthenia responded, with a non-committal sweetness.

"He's a little beast!" said her sister, warmly; "and he's visiting the Browns because he's nowhere else he go. He hasn't a farthing—"

"I never was mercenary," Parthenia interpolated, with a saintly smile.

"And Joel," her sister pursued—"Joel is the very best fellow in the world, and with that immense farm and his interest in the coal-mines."

Parthenia took another apple.

"Moretown is a nicer name than Simmons," she observed, flippantly.

"Oh, Par!" her sister murmured. "I wish I hadn't invited you here!"

Parthenia tripped to the door and hung herself on the arm of a big fellow coming in.

Sally Crosby had married Fred Wilson and gone to Derbyshire with him, chiefly because it had not occurred to her to refuse so high and broad a lover.

"Shall she rave about Joel Simmons and slander Mr. Moretown?" cried Parthenia, standing on tiptoe to look pathetically at him.

"By no means," said her brother-in-law, obligingly. "Moretown is a distinguished and high-born gentleman, and an ornament to the community; and Joel—we all know that Joel is a blood-thirsty, red-handed villain."

Parthenia laughed guiltily.

"She is going to Dovedale with him, Fred," said his wife, despairingly. "Say that she shall not. Say that it is going to rain."

"Oh, it won't rain!" said Parthenia, biting into her third apple.

Indeed, the day was a model of fineness at three o'clock that afternoon. The sun, softened from its noonday brightness, sent a slanting mellowed flood of light across the world, and took the keenness out of the air; the sky was guiltless of a cloud.

Parthenia, in a snug blue jacket and a hat with a tall bird, leaned forward from her seat at Mr. Moretown's side to dilate upon the beauty or the grandeur or the uniqueness of the objects they passed—objects which did not possess these qualities in a high degree, but which might easily appear to, to an enthusiastic young lady from the East.

Her companion listened passively. He was a small, dark man, rather full about the chin and rather red about the eyelids. Side by side with Parthenia's pink-and-white freshness he looked somewhat old and sallow; but at thirty-eight one cannot be expected to retain all one's youthful charms.

Perhaps a contrasting vision of Joel Simmons—tall, fair-haired, and ruddy—might have presented itself to Parthenia's quickly observant mind; but there is no proof of the fact.

The streamlets gurgled and splattered and splashed down their stony shelf in obvious indifference to the circumstance of two more night-seers having come to gaze at them.

Parthenia stood on the bank with clasped hands and glowing, upraised eyes, in an ecstasy of delighted approval; or she flitted about briskly and untiringly, to get all the different views.

She threw pebbles into the water and tried to trace their downward course; she pulled off her glove and leaned forward to hold her hand under the spray; she picked grasses and a sprig of peppermint for mementoes.

Mr. Moretown sat on a dry rock and watched her. He was not very responsive to her rapturous questions—he had not given much attention to the Dovedale—and he was rather relieved than otherwise when she declared, with a glance at the fast sinking sun and a little shriek, that they ought to have started home long ago. In fact the place was damp, and he felt a twinge of rheumatism in his left shoulder.

Parthenia took the reins from his hands as they drove away, and touched up the horse with a laughing word.

It was not an easy matter to have a lively time with Mr. Moretown. He appeared to have passed his days of liveliness; he looked at his sparkling companion with a dull, red-rimmed eye of inquiry.

But Parthenia chatted and laughed for three miles in gay self-sufficiency. Then she became aware that Mr. Moretown was fidgeting in his seat and coughing nervously, and staring around and above him.

"Look at that sky, Miss Crosby!" he said. His voice was shaky.

Parthenia looked. The soft grey of the heavens had grown darker; the brightness of the day had been suddenly overcast. A ragged cloud was struggling up in the west and obscuring the sun.

To Parthenia's uninitiated eyes the change was not momentous.

"It's going to rain," she observed, tranquilly.

"Rain!" her companion repeated. (Parthenia stared at him wonderingly; his teeth were chattering.) "It's going to blow a terrible gale, and we're a mile from anywhere!"

He grasped the reins and laid the whip on the horse.

"Dear me!" murmured Parthenia.

She was not much impressed; she watched the excited little man amusedly.

They rattled along. The darkness of the sky spread itself through the air; the twilight seemed deepening into night with unnatural rapidity. The cloud over the sun took on a dense, greenish blackness; there was an odd sound, like the distant breathing of some monster, and the dust began to fly.

Mr. Moretown stood up in the trap and leaned over as he lashed the horse.

"The inn's a quarter of a mile down!" he gasped. "Oh, lord!"

The horse plunged on, with ears laid back and quivering limbs.

A flying fence-rail planted itself in his path, and he stopped affrightedly, standing stock-still under the fierce fall of blows.

Mr. Moretown muttered incoherently under his breath. Then he threw down the reins and leaped from the trap.

"Come along, Miss Crosby!" he screamed. "It's our only chance; it's our last—"

His voice was lost in the rush of the wind.

Parthenia looked after him amazedly as he struggled up the road, staggering from side to side, a dim blot in the dust and darkness.

She could feel the trap shake beneath her, and she stepped down from it instinctively. The horse was trembling and pawing the ground. She seized him by the bit and stroked his nose, and looked helplessly about her.

A tree stood two rods away. She made her way to it—almost lifted from her feet by the savage force of the wind—leading the shrinking horse. It was a swirling blackness all about her.

She threw an arm around the tree and laid her face upon it, to shut out the uncanny sight. She heard a rain of light missiles against the trap, and the crashing fall of heavy limbs.

"Parthenia—Par— Oh, my dear, are you hurt?" a hoarse voice shouted in her ear.

She looked up into Joel Simmons's face, close to her own.

She could not make out in the dimness that he was wild-eyed and haggard, that his hat was gone, and that there was a bruise on his cheek.

He grasped her arm tightly. In the excitement of the moment he slipped his hand downward to her waist. In the excitement of the moment she clung to him with both her own.

"I've been looking for you," he said, simply. "I wouldn't trust you out of sight with that—"

Where is he? he broke off.

"Gone to the inn," she responded, with experimental gravity.

Joel's face darkened.

"We'll go straight home, then," he announced, grimly. "We won't stop there."

Her clear laugh rang out oddly enough on the riotous air.

"Did you think I cared for him?" she cried. She reached up, still laughing, to stroke his ruffled hair.

"It's easing up; we can go in a minute," he said, rather weakly.

So sudden a *douche* of happiness had a strangely-debilitating effect.

Fred Wilson was reading a paper by the light of a lamp in the sitting-room. He had a window open, and he seemed indifferent to the dirt and miscellany that had whirled into the room. He greeted his sister-in-law with composure.

"Where did you find her, Joel?" he inquired, unexcitedly. "Seared out of her wits by that little, spindling gust, I suppose?"

"Where is Sally?" murmured Parthenia.

"In the kitchen," her husband responded, in the tone of one whose disgust has grown into resignation.

Parthenia went to the cellar door.

"She'll be ridiculously glad, Joel," she said, with a frowning, smiling, backward glance.

STICK TO THE PROGRAMME.—When you have fixed upon a plan, even in comparatively trivial matters, do not reverse or vary it, except for good reason. Decision of character will thus in time become habitual; and habit has well been described as second nature. The power of the will can be cultivated; and there is nothing more deserving the attention of young men. At the same time decision of character should not be confounded with the unreasoning obstinacy which is rather the characteristic of the donkey than of an intelligent human being.

VERNON'S DESTINY.

—O—

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE are some women, who, though they may go through their lives without a thought of matrimony; who, though they may never have a prospect of being wives and having children of their own, are yet born with the instinct of maternity, who love all children as a matter of course, and show oftentimes more truly a mother's heart towards the little unconscious one than her who bore them.

Meg Charteris had never had a lover. She was looked upon as a "born" old maid. From earliest girlhood she had seemed marked out for a single life; and yet, as she sat in Nurse Edwards's best parlour, with the little nameless child in her arms, mother-love shone in her eyes; and no baby born in the purple could have been tended more delicately than was this daughter of an unknown waif by the Honourable Miss Charteris.

Lady Maude came in presently, a look of unwonted anxiety on her calm, sweet face.

"I cannot make it out, Meg. Dr. Williams has the gravest fears for her life. She is quite conscious, and I have implored her to tell me the names of her friends, that I may send for them, but she only shakes her head!"

"What does the doctor think?"

"My dear child, he is as puzzled as I am. Her clothes are of the poorest description, and worn almost to rags; but she has every appearance of gentle birth, and her little hands are white and delicate as snowflakes, and so thin that her wedding-ring almost drops off her finger!"

Lady Maude had been much relieved to perceive that wedding-ring. Gentle and kind by nature, she must have helped the unhappy stranger under any circumstances; but she did it far more freely after she had seen the plain, golden circlet which to her mind was the sign-manual of the waif's respectability.

"Is she a widow?" hazarded Meg. "I should think she must have married against the wishes of her parents, and lost her husband!"

"He must be dead!" decided Lady Maude. "No man could let such a beautiful, young wife go roaming about the world alone!"

"Has she asked for the child?"

"No! Only when he told her it was a girl she just murmured, 'Thank Heaven,' I think. Those are the only words she has spoken."

"I should like to see her."

"You can go in, but you must be very careful, Meg, not to excite her. Any agitation might be fatal to her, the doctor says."

Meg waited for no second permission, but stole quietly into the sick room. She had thought the stranger beautiful the day before in her shabby garb of rusty black; she deemed her lovely now, as she lay on the white lavender-scented bed, wrapped in one of Lady Maude's own garments of fine cambric, trimmed with delicate Indian embroidery.

The hard despair was gone, too, from her face. Yesterday she had seemed a woman; to-day she looked a child as pure and innocent as the infant in the next room; her hair hung round her like a golden veil, and her blue eyes shone like stars.

Meg went up to her and took her hand. Then, on a sudden impulse, she bent over her and kissed her brow. The girl flushed crimson.

"You should not have done that!" she whispered; "no one kisses me now."

It seemed to Meg the saddest speech ever made, but she would not answer it. She only drew a chair a little nearer to the bed, and sat down.

"I have come to stop with you a little while. May I talk to you?"

"I cannot talk much, I am so tired"—she passed one hand across her brow—"and it all seems so wonderful."

"It must seem strange to be with us whom you never saw until yesterday, but we will

take great care of you. Won't you tell us what to call you?"

The girl hesitated.

"I would like to tell you, but I am afraid. You see he might hear of it, and find me."

"Do you mean your father?"

"Oh, no! my father is in Heaven. Do you think if he had been alive he would not have protected me?"

Meg soothed her gently.

"And you have no mother?"

"No; nor sister nor brother."

"Then you are quite alone?"

"Oh, no! I wish I were! If I were alone I should be safe, and not have to creep about like some miserable guilty thing. Don't you understand?" and the blue eyes turned yearningly to Meg. "I am always hiding myself from him. I dare not make a friend, I dare not have a resting-place. I must go moving on; I must always be in concealment!"

"But why?"

"He would find me," and the blue eyes dilated with terror. "He vowed I should not escape him! He said—oh! bend your head close, and let me whisper." Then, as Meg obeyed, she breathed in faint, panting accents, "He said he would shut me up in a madhouse; that if there was no other way of bringing me to reason he would put me away in some asylum where I should never be heard of from year's end to year's end!"

Meg wiped the great beads of perspiration from her brow tenderly—ah! how tenderly!—but even yet she had no idea of the extent of her poor friend's misery.

"But surely your husband had relations if you have none? Could not his family protect you against this enemy?"

"What enemy?"

Was she wandering? Could the strange story be only an hallucination of a disordered brain? Meg wondered vaguely.

"The man whom you dread so much—who threatened to shut you up?"

"Yes, he is my enemy. I never thought to call him so; of course he is my enemy. But then, you see, he has the law on his side; he said so."

"But how? If he is neither your father nor mother what power can he have over you?"

The answer well-nigh took Meg's breath away.

"He is my husband."

"Your husband!"

"I could not help it," said the girl, fancying the intense surprise was meant as blame. "Indeed, indeed, I could not. I had been deceived; I had estranged my best friend, and he said I could never hold up my head again unless we were married. I thought he would be kind to me, and I was half beside myself with terror, and so I consented!"

"You poor child!"

Even then she did not connect the story with one she had often heard—even now she had not the slightest suspicion of the truth.

"I like to hear you call me that. It reminds me of the old days when I was a happy, careless schoolgirl. My favourite friend always called me 'child,' though she was younger than I!"

"Couldn't you write to her?"

"I dare not!"

"Why?"

"She is a young lady!" bitterly. "She has been presented at Court, and gone through the London season. Do you think her people would let her speak to me?"

"Why not?"

"Because I am not of their world. I never was, you know, quite; but now, only in the last six months, I have been a wanderer from everything good and pleasant. I have wanted everything but sorrow—done everything but ask alms; and when that lady found me, I was on my way to that!"

"You were going to Charteris Hall?"

"Yes. I had heard the old lord who lived there was good to soldiers. I thought he would befriend a soldier's child. My father had been in India; had served in the same regiment as

Colonel Charteris. I thought, just for old sake's sake, he would have pity on me. I tell you I had reached the lowest stage of distress—I was going to beg!"

"And now you will trust us, my aunt and I. We are both Charteris'. I had two uncles soldiers; my aunt is the widow of one. Be sure we will do our best for you. You shall stay with us until you are strong and well; and before you go Aunt Maude will think of some plan for your future life, which will help you from your husband's tyranny."

"Then you trust me?"

"Yes."

"Without knowing my name?"

"We would rather have known your name, because we felt your friends might be anxious about you; but if, indeed, you are friendless, it is no matter."

"I wish I could tell you, but I dare not."

"Never mind," said Meg, soothingly. "Do not fret about it, dear!"

"I must. Oh! Miss Charteris, I am not twenty-one yet; and think what a wreck I have made of my life!"

"May I ask you something? It is nothing that will tell me even your name. Is there no hope of a reconciliation between you and your husband?"

"None."

"You are so young," pleaded Meg; "so young and helpless to roam the world like this! And the baby will want her father."

The girl turned round with fever-bright eyes, and two pink spots burning in her cheeks.

"I love my child," she said, eagerly, "as those do who have nothing else on earth to love; but I would rather fling her into the river and watch her drown than that the man who calls himself my husband should know of her existence."

"I see! Forgive me; I had no idea he had been so cruel to you as that! I thought, perhaps, you both quarrelled and parted in anger."

"I left him on my wedding-day, before I had worn his ring twelve hours. I knew him for what he was, but he found me out and forced me back. For a week I lived a life that was one long torture; then I found a way to escape again. What I had suffered made me more cautious, or perhaps I was getting more crafty, for this time I have been safe."

"Poor child!"

"Safe!" said the wail, feverishly. "Ah! lady, you don't know what that word means to me. For almost seven months I have wandered about a homeless exile. I have had the coarsest food, the roughest lodging. Many a night I have slept out in the open fields with only Heaven's blue sky for canopy; many a day I have gone from morn to night without even a crust of bread, and yet I never repented. I might be wearing silks and jewels; the child in the next room might have a nursery and attendants worthy a princess, and yet I have never for one instant regretted my course. In all my misery I never laid down to rest, I never rose in the morning, without a thanksgiving I was free from him."

"I wonder it has not killed you!"

She sighed.

"Sorrow does not kill, Miss Charteris, or if it does it takes years to do its work. Heaven knows I would gladly die; but for the thought of the child I would often have taken my life. I prayed—ah, Heaven! how I prayed!—that I and it might die together at its birth; but you see my prayer was left unanswered."

"And now you must live for her. You would not wish to leave her?"

"No; I must strive to protect her from her father. It was for my child's sake that I was going to the old Lord Charteris. I have my pride left. I should not have asked alms for myself, but for the sake of my unborn child I would have done it."

"My father is Lord Charteris now. Don't you think you can tell your story to him?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then will you trust yourself to my aunt and me? We will pledge our word never to say a word that would reveal your story if only you

will stay here—at least, until you are strong and well."

"And you will never ask me questions I dare not answer?"

"You shall tell us what you like, and leave the rest untold."

"I wonder why you are so good to me?"

"My dear, we are only treating you with common kindness. To whom should a woman look for sympathy if not to her sister-women?"

"But it was a woman who betrayed me! But for her I should now be a happy, careless girl! My husband was cruel enough to me, but he would never have blighted my life without her aid."

"One thing surprised us. It was my sister-in-law who found you, Mrs. Charteris. She used to be Lena Travers, and when we mentioned the name, it seemed to excite you strangely. Lit is so dear and good, I can't think she ever did anything to harm you—indeed, she has had a very sad life. Her parents were very poor, and, I fear, not too honest. Her elder sister, Mrs. Merton, treated her like dirt; and I fancy, till she knew my brother, Lena had no one to love or care for her."

"I never saw Miss Travers in my life," said the invalid; "but my husband used to visit the family when they lived abroad, and so the very name of Travers strikes terror to my soul."

"No wonder."

"You will not tell her!"

"Lena! Certainly not. That is why we have brought you here, at home, as my brother Neil is the only doctor in the place. He must have gleaned something of your story. Rest here; you will be quite safe. Dear old nurse never betrayed anyone in her life, and aunt and I are staid people, and can keep a secret well."

"Will you thank her for me, please? Don't let her think me ungrateful."

When Lady Maude heard all Meg had to tell her she looked unusually thoughtful.

"I always thought the marriage laws wanted reforming, Meg!" she said, gravely.

"All husbands can't be so good as your poor uncle, and it seems to me once married, a woman is completely at her husband's mercy."

Meg had private suspicions. She should not have regarded her uncle Tom as a model husband, but his widow evidently considered him perfection, and the niece was far too tender-hearted to wound her by seeming to question the fact.

"I hope all husbands are not so bad as this one!" she said slowly; "but aunt, do you really mean he could compel her to return to him?"

"I am afraid, he could. He is evidently a rich man, and could support her in comfort. I believe if the case were tried, in law he could insist upon her return."

"But if she refused? Women can't be dragged about by force nowadays!"

"She could be dragged back to him by a power stronger than force! He could claim the child; and I feel pretty sure where the little one went the mother would gladly follow."

"But I thought children belonged to their mothers for a long while? At any rate, until they are seven years old?"

"I believe they do, generally, but just think of the position. He—(by the way, Meg, I wish she would let us call her something, even if it is not her true name; to say 'she' perpetually is so perplexing)—is penniless, her utmost efforts could not command more than the scantiest food for the child! Its father is rich, and by her own showing could bring it up in luxury. If the babe's future home rested between living with a father, who would give it a spacious nursery, with trained attendants, and a mother who could provide at best a humble lodging and such care as she could spare from her daily toil, I don't think the law would hesitate long."

"It is a cruel injustice."

"I wonder what he has done?"

"The husband?"

"Yes. Clearly he has been cruel to her, but

yet she makes no specific charge against him. I am afraid Lena's family know so many queer young men that it would be useless to try to find him out by their assistance."

"I would not try. I think it would simply kill her if she discovered it."

"What a sweet face she has!"

"And the child too!"

"By the way, Meg, the Doctor seems to think it should be christened, being premature; she is very delicate. You must try and get the mother to fix on a name without making her anxious. Tell her it is a mere precaution."

Meg found the task easier than she had expected.

"I shall be glad to have it done. As soon as I am better we must 'move on'; and in the wandering life I shall have to lead to arrange a christening would be a great difficulty."

"And you have thought of a name?"

The young mother hesitated.

"I should like it to be Hyacinth!"

"Hyacinth! That is a lovely name. Is it your own?"

"Oh, no! But I have thought a great deal of the flower lately. It has been oddly mixed up in my life, and I should like my little child to be called Hyacinth!"

"And what else—"

She grew white almost to her lips.

"There must be some other name, dear!" said Meg, who pined her intensely. "The baby must be described as the daughter of someone! You need not give your husband's name; the one you bore before your marriage would be quite sufficient."

She shook her head.

"It might give him a clue. My mother's name was Clifford; I am sure she would lend it to me!"

"And—forgive me—may we call you Mrs. Clifford—sunt and I?"

"Willingly. But would you not say 'Pearl'?"

It was a foolish fancy; but there were just six of us elder girls at school, and we gave each other pet names after six precious stones. These were Ruby and Coral, Pearl and Turquoise, Emerald and Sapphire. I was Pearl. I have never heard the name since I left school. My husband would never identify it with me."

"It just suits you!" said Meg, kissing her. "You shall be Pearl to us henceforward. You cannot think how awkward it has been, having no name to speak of you by!"

The next time the Doctor came Lady Maude pointedly spoke of his patient as "Mrs. Clifford," and the baby was duly registered as Hyacinth Clifford—no surname was needed. When the clergyman came to christen her, being a private baptism, there was no certificate involved; all those mere formalities could be attended to later on.

"How we shall miss them when they go away?" said Lady Maude. "Meg, I feel quite inclined to adopt Pearl if you will adopt baby Hyacinth!"

Meg smiled.

"I think that is impracticable, aunty. Pearl must live in the strictest seclusion for some time."

"I wonder what your people think of us?" hazarded Lady Maude.

They had no opportunity of saying what they thought, for Lady Maude had only allowed her own carriage to take them as far as Gloucester station, and had driven the rest of the distance in a hired fly. She and Meg meant to go over once a week for letters, taking it in turns, but they now both resolved not to betray their whereabouts.

"Papa must have taken his brood to Brussels!" said Meg; "and you know Liv and Neil are in such an early stage of their married life that I don't expect they have even realized our conduct is extraordinary!"

"Well—one blessing of people in love—they are too much engrossed to criticize their relations; but still I think I had better go over the first time, Meg. You see they would not like to cross-examine me as fully as they might you!"

"You are the best aunty in the world, and

always make a point of taking disagreeable things upon yourself. I know that well enough by this time."

But it so happened neither Lady Maude nor her niece went over to Fir Cottage quite as soon as they had planned.

The danger feared by Dr. Williams actually came to pass, and when she was a week old little Hyacinth pined and drooped. For three days they watched anxiously by the child; then on the close of the third she drew her last breath quite peacefully in Meg's arms.

"How shall we tell her mother?" asked Lady Maude, remembering similar grief of her own. "This little one was all she had in the world—the blow will half kill her!"

"I think not," said Meg, gravely. "Hyacinth was Pearl's joy, but she was also her great anxiety. I believe grief for the child will be swallowed up in belief that the tale is safe for her from her father!"

And so it proved. Pearl's blue eyes just turned one glance at Meg, and she understood.

"Is it all over?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Don't cry," as she saw the tears steal down Lady Maude's cheek, "she is better off. Just think what her life would have been with me! I loved her, and by mere force of love I might have saved her from her father, but that one effort would have taken all my strength. Love wouldn't have warmed and fed her, love wouldn't have given her a hundred things that little children need. If she grew to womanhood love wouldn't have spared her the finger of scorn, because seemingly she had no father, her mother no husband! Ah! my little one, you are better off. They won't taunt you with being nameless in heaven!"

But though she rejoiced for the child's sake she mourned for her own. From that moment her recovery seemed to be retarded. She had no appetite, and they very often surprised her in tears.

Lady Maude would not leave her, and although they had now been away a fortnight, and it was really necessary to go to Fir Cottage, and see what letters and messages had arrived, she was forced to entrust the errand to Meg.

"Say nothing more than you can help, my dear; but if the worst came to the worst I think you might trust Lena. Neil, dear old fellow, is too impetuous to make a safe confidant, but his wife has a man's head and a woman's heart—rare and most happy combination!"

Meg was quite willing to go—that is, she much preferred herself undertaking the expedition to letting Lady Maude tear herself away from the invalid; but, truth to say, she felt strangely anxious about the result of her visit. She had no fears of Lena's questions; she thoroughly liked her sister-in-law, and had for her a very real respect. Neil's curiosity, if he had any, she could silence. Meg always had been able to manage her brother judiciously.

CHAPTER XV.

The servants at Fir Cottage were not likely to dare to question their lady's proceedings, however eccentric. And yet, in spite of all this, Meg was uneasy. For her own part, she would have let the most important letters in the world wait rather than go to Charteris in quest of them.

But the mail had come in from Ceylon, and Lady Maude was anxious for news of old friends.

Meg drove to Fir Cottage, and found quite a pile of letters. The servants were delighted to see her, and made much of her in respectful fashion. It was only when she had discussed her late dinner that she thought of going over to the Rosery.

"I suppose Mrs. Charteris has been here to ask for news of us, White?" she said to the pleasant-faced housemaid.

"That she has, miss, lots of times. She came to bring you the news that my lord and the family had got safe to Brussels, and she seemed strangely put out that I couldn't tell rightly when you were expected home, or give her your full address. Mrs. Charteris is not looking well, ma'am. I told her so yesterday, but she said she had a headache with the heat."

"Have you any idea if I shall find her at home to-day, White?"

"You're pretty sure to, ma'am. She said it was so hot yesterday she shouldn't go out any more till the cool of the evening. It made me quite sorry to see her yesterday—she was so pale and tired."

It was not like Lena to be either, and Meg felt puzzled; but she put on her shady hat and walked down the village street to the Rosery without feeling any very pressing anxiety on the matter.

As she reached the gate a very handsome man was passing through it. Meg turned to take a second look at him—for strangers were rare enough—and she felt quite sure she had never seen him before. The closer survey told her nothing, except that he was dressed in the height of the fashion, and had an expression she did not like.

"Mrs. Charteris is in her own sitting-room," said the servant who opened the door. "Will you go to her there, miss?"

But when Meg opened the familiar door, and went into the dear old room, the Lena who came to meet her and threw herself into her arms gave her a shock. The young wife's eyes were red with weeping, and she looked just the ghost of the bright young sister-in-law Meg had left only a fortnight before.

"Oh, Lit, my darling! What is the matter? Is Neil ill—what has happened?"

"Meg, I am in awful trouble. I have been to Fir Cottage over and over again to ask when you were coming back; but they could never tell me, and I have gone nearly out of my mind with worry and suspense."

"My dear Lena! but what has happened? I left you the picture of happiness, and I find you—"

"Miserable!" said Lit, supplying a word when Meg paused; "but I've got you back now, and I don't mind, for you will help me." Saying which young Mrs. Charteris bolted the door, closed and locked the French windows, drew down the blinds, and when she had completed these precautions, which filled Meg with undefined alarm, came back, sat down at her sister's feet, and with her head in Meg's lap cried like a little child.

"My dear, dear Lit, my dear girl, what is it? You are frightening me terribly!"

"It's—Neil!"

"My dear! Do you mean that he is ill? Surely you can't have quarrelled?"

"He's the picture of health," confessed Lit, tearfully, "and we have never had a quarrel yet; but he is being ruined, and it's all my fault—every bit."

Poor Miss Charteris felt amazed. That something very dreadful must have happened she feared from Lit's face; but if her brother was well and on harmonious terms with his young wife, she really could not imagine in what the trouble consisted.

"Do try and tell me what you mean? I am getting terrified, Lit; besides, Neil may come home, and then we shall have no opportunity for private conversation at all!"

She was on the right track. Lena calmed herself by an effort, and asked,—

"Have the servants told you about the Hall?"

"Not a word. Is there anything to tell?"

"The Denzils have arrived."

Meg started.

"Is it possible?"

"It is certain. They came two days after you left, but no one has seen her."

"Do you mean he keeps her shut up?"

"She has brought a vineyard maid, called Cat, with her, who won't let anyone see her. They left the train at Gloucester and drove on. Someone told Neil she was carried upstairs just a bundle of shawls."



["HOW SHALL WE TELL HER MOTHER?" ASKED LADY MAUDE, REMEMBERING SIMILAR GRIEF OF HER OWN.]

"And she but twenty! Poor, poor young thing!"

"No one has seen her but Catt; not one of the servants is allowed to enter the room. Though Neil is a doctor he has not been called in to prescribe for her; though I am her own cousin's wife, when I left my card I was refused admittance!"

"This is bad enough; but, my dear Lit, it is no reason you should say Neil is ruined."

"You haven't heard all."

"Go on, then."

"Reginald Denzil has been here, and—taken in Neil."

"My dear Lit, do speak plainly."

"I mean just that I knew he was a clever man who would stick at nothing. I knew he was wicked and unscrupulous, but that his manner usually impressed strangers favourably; still I never thought, I never dreamed, he could take in Neil!"

"But has he? Neil used to be more bitter against him than all of us, and used to say he was unfit to enter a room where honest people sat."

"And he brings him here, invites him to dinner with us, to dinner—I mean to breakfast—tea, and supper. The man literally haunts the house!"

"But how has he managed it? I am sure Neil used to dislike him enough."

"He met him out and introduced himself; he apologized for the scant courtesy shown your father, but said it was entirely his wife's doing; he told Neil Mrs. Denzil so bitterly resented the slights shown her mother that she would never willingly speak civilly to a Charteris; he said it was her caprice to come here, although he represented to her it was almost an insult to the family to come among them and not visit them. She is suffering from a sprained foot, which I suppose explains her being carried upstairs and keeping her own rooms. Meg, Mr. Denzil was so clever, he dressed up his story with such consummate skill, that if I didn't know his true character I must have been taken in!"

"And Neil?"

"Neil believes Rex Denzil to be a careless, good-natured fellow, no one's enemy but his own, much maligned and greatly to be pitied. He has adopted him completely as a cousin, but is so incensed against his wife that he will not hear her name mentioned."

"It sounds incredible!"

"It's true! Neil is too good! He believes in people too readily. Actually, Meg, he accused me of an uncharitable spirit because I cannot be friendly to Mr. Denzil! He said the poor fellow had suffered enough at the hands of his kinswoman and mine! I grant Isola treated him badly, but I feel pretty sure Neil has not, Meg! I can't believe the story they tell of her which Mr. Denzil repeats so glibly, and my poor Neil was taken in so simply. I believe that Nell Charteris—to call her by her old name—is shut up under the guardianship of that woman, and that her husband persecutes her. So far from not being willing to see us I believe he keeps her away from any living creature who could pity or cherish her; and, Meg, I don't mean to sit by and see it!"

"But—my dear!" said Meg, who was of the long-suffering rather than defensive order of women, "how will you prevent it?"

"I don't care! I won't have my husband made to seem as bad as Reginald Denzil. Denzil's very name is a byword for scorn. I won't have Neil's the same! He is so good and easy-going. He will be made a tool of completely if I let him!"

"He would never assist Mr. Denzil in any design against his wife!"

"He is assisting him now!"

"How?"

"By his countenance! Since he was received here, every house in the neighbourhood is open to him, and everywhere he tells the same tale. Oh! I can see it all. He is trying to worm himself into respectability, and take his place as a county gentleman. Then he will either have that poor thing shut

up here, or send her to some cheap place where she can be boarded out while he enjoys her money!"

"Lit, this is horrible!"

"I am sure it is true!"

"You are so imaginative! You write novels till you are always on the watch for romances in real life!"

Lit turned to her piteously.

"Don't you believe me, Meg?"

"I think you believe every word you have told me, dear?"

"And don't you? Oh! Meg, you are my only hope. If you don't help me I shall have to give up in despair and let things go. Perhaps when the treatment of Nell Charteris is public property, and my Neil's name is branded with infamy, you will be sorry you refused to help me!"

"My dear!" said Meg, soothingly, "I never refused to help you. I only asked what you wanted me to do!"

"I want to see Neil!"

"But she has refused to see you! She has treated you with insolence!"

"They say she has! Meg, do you remember Guy Vernon, who was in the accident with me? Do you know you called him the model of a perfect English gentleman. Well, your cousin Helen was his ideal of womanhood. Don't ask me how I know it. I do know it now. Say—could the girl Guy Vernon loved be the low, revengeful creature she is represented?"

"No!—but—"

"Leave out the but, Meg! Tell me in one word—will you help me?"

"Yes! but it is against my judgment!"

"Never mind your judgment!"

"And what is your first step, Lena. I suppose you have made some plan of action?"

"I have!"

"And the first step?"

"Don't laugh at me, Meg! It is too solemn. I mean to get into Charteris Hall!"

(To be continued.)



[IT OCCURRED TO KENNETH THAT SOMEWHERE OR OTHER HE HAD SEEN MISS ROSE BEFORE.]

NOVELLETTE.]

DOLLY.

—30—

CHAPTER I.

If this story has a moral it is a simple one—don't name your daughters after any sister of her father's, however delightful that sister may be, unless she has already entered the bonds of holy matrimony. If you do so you will at best subject your child to the risk of never getting a letter of her own (if staying with her aunt and namesake) until it has been opened and read—of course, by mistake. And at the worst, why it is just possible you might have to look on and see some stroke of good luck specially designed by Providence for the niece calmly appropriated by the aunt.

But these facts never occurred to poor, pretty Hilda Delaval when she found herself dying—a forlorn, desolate little widow, with a little slumbering bundle of infant humanity beside her, whose life was surely costing her her own.

Perhaps she was not so sorry to lay down her burden of life, for her lot had not been a dazzling one. A beautiful girl, child of doting parents, she had chosen to give up all for love, and make a runaway match with a man hardly so well off as her father's butler.

For six months she was perfectly, profoundly happy. Then Hugh Delaval took to his bed with low fever, and was dead before his child-wife knew his danger.

A few weeks of bitter grief, and Hilda, at nineteen, was following him on the last long journey, tenderly cared for by Hugh's young sister—a tall, unformed girl of seventeen, who had left her home with her father in the north of England to do her best for her brother's widow.

Rose Delaval was a born nurse; she seemed to know by instinct just what to do and what

to leave undone. She had never seen Hilda until summoned to her brother's deathbed; but she loved her at first sight, and she had tried to buoy her up with thoughts of the quiet home in Westmoreland, and the kindly welcome awaiting her there.

Alas! poor, pretty Mrs. Delaval would want no more earthly welcomes. Doctor and nurse had both told the young sister-in-law the truth; and now, at Hilda's express desire, she and her baby were left alone with the one friend they could claim—the tall, slender, seventeen-year-old aunt.

"You will be good to her, Rose? Poor child, you are the only mother she will ever know."

"Of course I will!" said Miss Delaval, promptly. "My father will love her as his own child. You know, Hilda, he would have welcomed you."

"I know. You'll call her Rose, dear?"

"Why not Hilda?"

"I promised Hugh."

"Hugh!"

"He always said he would call the baby after you—if it was a girl. He said he did not want there to be two Hilda Delavals. So you will call her Rose?"

"If you wish it."

"I do. I don't think mine has been a lucky name. I seem to have brought only sorrow to all who loved me."

"Don't say that, dear! Remember, you made Hugh happy."

"But if he had not toiled hard, for my sake, he might not have caught the fever that killed him."

It was no time to argue with her; Rose felt that. She stooped to kiss the sleeping baby.

"You know we will do our best for her, Hilda. But there are your own parents. Don't you think they will feel to have the best claim on your little girl?"

"No!" and excitement lent the dying mother fresh strength. "Rose, as you love me, promise me you will never tell them of her birth. Oh! don't forsake my child—don't

let her go among those who hated her father, and drove her mother into exile! Promise me she shall never leave you?"

"Never until she is old enough to choose. I promise that freely. Oh, Hilda! if you could only stay with us, we could make you so happy in our beautiful Westmoreland."

Hilda shook her head.

"I could never be happy anywhere now. I should be wanting Hugh always. You see, Rose, when one loves as we did it is not for a month or a year, but for all time. Nothing would ever have comforted me; it is best as it is."

And with her hand clasped fast in that of her sister-in-law, poor, pretty Hilda Delaval closed her eyes on the world which had not been all sunshine to her, and which, though not yet twenty, she was well content to leave.

A week later the two Roses left the small suburban lodgings, and travelled to Westmoreland, where, in a pretty rural village, stood the old Rectory, where the elder Rose had been born, and where her old father and blind mother were eagerly awaiting their sunbeams.

There is a great deal said about unkindness, and the grudging reception meted out to poor relations. But perhaps Westmoreland is behind the world in its feelings, for Hilda's baby was received by the old grandparents as joyfully as though it had brought them a fortune.

There was kindly grief for the poor young mother, but a deep content that their boy's only child was to be their own.

"Give her up, indeed!" said the Rector, with a nearer approach to anger than his wife had ever seen. "Give her up to the proud folks who drove her mother from the house, and scouted my boy as not good enough for them! Not while I have a crust to share with her. She's my grandchild, and my lord and lady shall not get hold of her if there's law in England!"

He might have spared himself the outburst. Ten years passed on, and no attempt was made

to rob them of the little orphan. She grew up in the pleasant Westmoreland village, as much his own as though she had no other kith and kin. Perhaps the noble family who had disowned Hilda did not even know that she had left a child—perhaps they scorned the baby as they had done her father.

Anyway, they made no advances, and the old Rector and his blind wife were gathered to their rest without ever having had to defend their claim to their son's child.

Rose Delaval senior was thirty, and Rose Delaval junior thirteen, when they had to leave their pretty, old-fashioned home.

The Rector had been a prudent man, and his savings, augmented by the sum for which he had insured his life, would bring in nearly two hundred a year. So there was no fear of actual poverty to haunt the elder Rose and for her niece's benefit she moved to London, and took a small semi-detached house in the neighbourhood of Kensington, that Rose might attend art classes, and see something of the park and museums.

Time had dealt very kindly with the Rector's daughter. She was quite as plump as in her unformed girlhood. But her simple, tranquil life in the sleepy Westmoreland village had left her complexion fresh and rosy. There was not a line on her face, nor a wrinkle on her brow, and she looked fully ten years less than her real age.

She was a sensible woman, and brought up her niece kindly and well; but she had one terror which haunted her perpetually. It had sprung up on her sister-in-law's deathbed, and never wholly left her—that someday or other her mother's relatives would put a claim to little Rose.

So long as the Rector lived the fear was only a sleeping one, for she knew that his claim was as near, or nearer, than the one she dreaded.

But the moment her father died the terror woke afresh. What was she at best but Rose's aunt, a single, unprotected female of narrow means? How could she hope to keep the child against the claims of a grandfather of noble blood, and backed by a handsome fortune to support his views.

Miss Delaval fairly worshipped her niece, and the thought of losing her was positive pain. To guard against it she took the greatest pains to hide herself and Rose from all chance meetings. They lived in the strictest retirement—they never made a single friend.

No one was allowed to cross the threshold. Even for extra precaution, the aunt denied her darling the use of her proper name, and continued the pet title of Dolly, by which she had been known in her baby days.

Miss Delaval was devoted heart and soul to Dolly. But it never occurred to her she might be doing the girl an injury in thus keeping her hidden away from any clearer recognition from her relatives.

And so five years ebbed peacefully away. Dolly was eighteen, and as tall as her aunt. It was the only link of resemblance between them. Rose Delaval the elder was stout and rosy—a good face, but plain and hard-featured, with nothing to attract strangers; and Dolly was her mother's own child, with all the dead Hilda's beauty, only, instead the air of fragility which even in her girlhood had marked the young wife as a hot-house flower.

Miss Delaval almost screamed when she looked at her niece. It seemed to her that no one could see Dolly without guessing at her parentage. She kept her as secluded as possible, and yet she was full of fears.

June had come round again and brought Dolly's eighteenth birthday. They made quite a little festival of it at Acacia Cottage. There were strawberries and cream, a home-made cake and other delicacies. The tea was spread in the little garden, and Miss Delaval and Dolly lingered over it in full enjoyment of the pleasant summer evening.

It was the heroine of the day who broke the silence.

"Aunt, isn't it strange we have no friends?"

Miss Delaval started; she had always feared a time might come when Dolly would be curious. Surely it had not come already?

"Why, no," she answered briskly, as though the thing were most natural. "You see, Dolly, we are not rich; we couldn't give parties and entertain. Poor people never make friends!"

"But all the other people in this road don't seem much richer than we are! I'm sure their houses look ever so much shabbier, and they haven't a tidy servant like Susan!"

Miss Delaval admitted, with a glow of housewifely pride, that Acacia Cottage certainly looked as nice or nicer than its neighbours, and that Susan was the neatest servant in the road.

Too late she saw her mistake, for Dolly followed up her advantage remorselessly.

"Well, the other people have friends. I don't mean they give parties, but they have people come to tea, and drop in to see them. Now, we never do; for all the use it is to us, auntie, we need never have a knocker! You and I have our latch-key, the tradespeople go to the back gate, no one but our two selves ever goes up the steps at all!"

"I don't think this is a sociable place, Dolly."

"Don't you wish it was?"

"Not particularly."

In truth, she had selected a suburban residence for the express reason that it was possible to make for years past close to a person in such a locality without getting acquainted.

"I am eighteen to-day, you know, auntie, and I don't know anyone!"

"Not here," said Miss Delaval gently. "Not here, perhaps, but we have plenty of friends left in Westmoreland."

Dolly's face brightened.

"Dear old Westmoreland! I should like to go back there—not to live, you know, but just on a visit. The Squire has asked us so many times, auntie. Don't you think we might go this summer?"

"Not for worlds," was the unspoken reply of Rose Delaval's heart, but she only said aloud, "I had other plans for this season, Dolly."

Dolly clapped her hands.

"Do you mean it, really? Had you really thought of going somewhere? Oh, auntie! how delightful!"

"Are you so very tired of London, Dolly?"

"Not of London; but auntie, this place isn't London! It calls itself Kensington, but it's Fulham really! It's full of make-believes. It isn't town, it isn't country. All the streets look like each other, and one can't get away from bricks-and-mortar; and you know, Aunt Rose, we have been here five years without going away even for a day!"

"I know all that, Dolly, and I have been planning to go to the seaside. Everything is settled nearly, and I think we can start on the first of July."

Dolly hugged her enthusiastically.

"And where to?"

"You shall have your choice of any place in Kent or Sussex."

"Do let's go indoors," was the prompt reply, "and get Bradshaw and an atlas. I should like to look out our train at once!"

"You had better settle first where you are going to."

"So I had. Auntie, we will be extravagant and send Susan for a newspaper. All the excursion trains and cheap trips are in that, and I haven't even an idea what seaside places there are easy to get at."

Miss Delaval smiled and gave way. She produced the penny for the paper, and as soon as Susan had removed all traces of the feast she was dispatched to the nearest newsagent's.

Dolly sat down with paper and pencil, prepared to take note of any desirable places whose attractions Miss Delaval might read out; but her aunt was so long in beginning she grew the least bit impatient.

"I'm quite ready, auntie."

No answer.

"Aunt Rose, do begin."

The paper flattered unheeded to the ground. In an agony Dolly saw that Miss Delaval had fallen back helpless on the sofa, her eyes were closed, her face white as death.

To call for Susan was the work of an instant. Then the two chafed the ice-cold hands, and applied brandy to the tightly clenched teeth. But it was a long time before their efforts met with any success; then a long gasping sigh followed by a sobbing, terrified Dolly saw much as the woman itself.

She was thankful when Miss Delaval, speaking in her natural voice, but shivering as though it had been winter, said she thought she would go to bed.

"And Dolly, I shall not want anything again tonight. Don't come in and disturb me as you go to bed; rest is all I need. A good night's sleep, and I am sure I shall be quite myself by the morning."

Dolly obeyed with the unquestioning submission of one accustomed to be ruled. She was very troubled about her aunt, and when she was left alone felt very near to tears. Then she remembered the proposed excursion. Of course a week or two at the seaside was what auntie needed; she would come back again as strong as ever.

This reflection proved a wonderful restorative to Dolly, and she sat down in the heat of spirits, resolved to search the advertisements herself, and decide whether Brighton, or Dover, Margate, or Eastbourne would be the best place to honour with their patronage.

But her resolution was vain—the paper had disappeared.

"Susan must have moved it in the fright of auntie's illness," decided Dolly.

But Susan strenuously denied doing anything of the kind. Her theory was it must have blown out of the window, and Dolly had to put with the loss; and presently crept up to bed with the great question still unsolved of what spot should be the scene of their summer wandering.

She need not have moved so quietly, for Miss Delaval was not asleep. Had Dolly's eyes only had power to penetrate into her aunt's room she would have seen her wrapped in her dressing-gown, seated at her writing-table, busily employed in the composition of a letter whose wording seemed a sore difficulty to her; while again and again she consulted the newspaper whose loss Dolly had so much deplored, which, instead of having been blown out of the window, had been carefully taken possession of by the mistress of Acacia Cottage.

After eighteen years of suspense her fear was realized at last. After eighteen years of secure possession, people were striving to deprive her of her one eye-lamb, but she would not give up Dolly without a struggle. She had received her from her dying mother, therefore she had the best right to her. Besides, did eighteen years of love and guidance count for nothing? No, she would fight her cause to the very death.

Nevertheless, she was sorely puzzled how to begin the letter, and kept seeking assistance from the advertisement which had so troubled her.

It was a very simple advertisement, but it was in the agony column; and I think few women could bear to be appealed to from that particular column of the newspaper without feeling a little nervous.

ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.—Wanted the present address of Rose Delaval, only child of Hugh Delaval, and Hilda his wife, deceased. Born in London, June 20th, 1864, and taken in infancy to the country. The above reward will be paid to any person giving the whereabouts of this young lady, or the same amount will be paid for positive proof of her death. Apply to Dyson and Carlyle, Solicitors, Pump Court Temple.

The end was that Miss Delaval tore up her attempts at letter-writing, crept downstairs,

and brought back "Bradehaw," studied its pages attentively, and then went where her niece imagined her to have been for hours—to bed.

"Auntie," was Dolly's bewildered exclamation, when Miss Delaval came into her room about seven o'clock the next morning, ready dressed in her walking things, "where on earth are you going?"

"I am going to Westmoreland!"

Dolly gasped.

"There is a grievous trouble threatening us both Dolly; I cannot tell you more now. I shall be away three days, only before I go I want you to give me your word you will not leave the house until I return."

"Auntie!"

Rose Delaval's grasp tightened on Dolly's wrist.

"I am going on urgent business, Dolly! I have to consult the Squire on a matter that is life or death to me, but I will not leave you unless I have your promise. Can you hesitate. It is but for three days?"

Dolly gave in at once.

"I shall be moped to death," she expostulated prettily; "but I can't vex you when you have been so ill. I promise faithfully I won't leave the house, until you come back; only auntie," and the spoilt child made a little pout—"be merciful; don't take advantage of my abject submission to be gone a week or two. If you don't come back at the end of your three days I shall go melancholy mad."

Miss Delaval smiled half sadly.

"If I am alive Dolly I shall be home the day after to-morrow!"

"It is the strangest thing I ever heard of," commented Miss Dolly to herself, when her aunt had departed, turning over on her side for a farewell doze before rising to the dreariness of her lonely day. "Aunt Rose, who hates travelling, who won't never go to Oxford street, if she can help it, and who had never been away from me in her life, suddenly, without a word of warning, sets off for Westmoreland! I can't make it out. She always seemed to so dislike the idea of going back to the old place! I'm sure the Squire has written to invite us every summer, but she would never hear of it, and now she has rushed off like this! What can it mean?"

CHAPTER II.

THE Squire (a title still prevailing in that remote Westmoreland village) was a man of seventy, but hale and hearty still.

Rose Delaval had always been a favourite with him; years ago it had been rumoured she was to marry his only son, but nothing ever came of the report. Claude Dugdale went abroad, and the old man remained alone in his grand old home, never breaking his intimacy at the Rectory, and letting all the world see plainly that he would have been quite willing to receive Miss Delaval as a daughter-in-law.

He had been very vexed when she left the north, had begged her to come to the Castle, and let Dolly be a kind of adopted grandchild, but she shook her head. She thanked the Squire for all his kindness, claimed one very solemn promise of him, and then turned her back upon her native village, and went to form a new home at Acacia Cottage.

Squire Dugdale did not forget her; he sent many a hamper of country produce with a letter neatly folded at the top, and he addressed this not to Miss Delaval, but to "R.D.," almost as though he were afraid for his favourite's name to be seen. Had she been a fugitive hiding from justice he could not have been more careful. In all his letters was an invitation to come to the Castle, and all ended up with the same phrase, "The emergency you expected has not yet arisen; if ever it should do so you will find a Dugdale is faithful to his trust."

A telegram apprised the Squire of his guest's coming. When, faint and spent with her long journey in the dark night hours, Rose Delaval reached Appleby, the Squire's close carriage was waiting to drive her the ten miles to the Castle, and the splendid horses stepped out briskly, so that the distance seemed a mere nothing, and through it all the old Squire said nothing, and would not let his favourite speak, but just sat there holding her hand.

Not till they were at the Castle, and her hat and shawl were removed, not till she had done justice to a savoury repast, would he let her tell him her errand. Then he patted her shoulder, and said, in his fatherly way,—

"Perhaps you will sleep better if we have had our talk. Come to the library, and let me hear all about it."

Rose Delaval drew a newspaper cutting from her purse. It was the advertisement which had brought about her journey.

The Squire read it gravely.

"When did you see this?"

"Last night."

"Then you have done nothing?"

"Nothing!"

"I am beforehand with you then, I saw the notice a month ago, and I wrote to the lawyers to ask what it was all about."

"You wrote to them!" reproachfully. "Oh! Squire, how could you?"

"It was the only thing to be done. Then if I told you you would frighten yourself into fits. I wrote and asked for information. I thought they would know the master of Dugdale Castle was not a man to be trifled with."

"And it is as I feared—Lord Dornton wants to claim my darling!"

"It is not as you feared. Lord Dornton is dead and his wife also. He left his estate, fortune, furniture, houses, all he had to the nephew, who succeeds to his title on one condition. Can you guess it?"

"Was it anything to do with Dolly?"

"Everything! The new Earl only enjoys his estates, only touches his vast wealth on condition that he marries Rose Delaval, only child of his cousin Hilda."

"But it is monstrous! Dolly is a baby!"

"She is eighteen, and the Earl is nine-and-twenty. Only her death or her refusal to accept him can release Lord Dornton from the necessity of marrying her."

"And if he refuses?"

"It all goes to her. In that case your Dolly would be the richest heiress in England."

Rose Delaval kept silence. She thought of the beautiful girl she loved so dearly. She remembered Dolly's yearnings for a wider life, her longings after ease and amusement. It seemed to the aunt never fate could be fairer than her favourite's, if only Lord Dornton could be brought to refuse the honour of her hand.

"You are surprised?" said the Squire, slowly. "What do you think of it?"

"She shall never be forced to marry anyone."

"My dear Rose, no one has any object in forcing her. Her refusal would leave Lord Dornton free to enjoy his wealth, and choose any bride he pleased. What I think of is the splendid position she would hold if this match were brought about! Fancy our little Dolly an English countess!"

"With a husband who despised her!"

"I think you are hard on Dornton! He is a fine young fellow. I met him often before he came into the title, and I assure you that Dolly could not be in better hands."

"I can't believe in a man ready to marry a girl he has never seen, just for money."

"You put it harshly. As it happens, he is as indignant at the will as you can be. But the position is this. He is young and heart-whole; he has never yet seen the woman he would care to make his wife, and so he is perfectly willing to see your Dolly, and try if he can care for her."

"She is to be shown to him on approval? How very condescending, to be sure!"

"Rose!"

"I can't help it, Squire! Dolly is the darling of my life!"

"My dear, there need be no trouble for her in the matter. Until Lord Dornton has seen her there is no need even to mention the subject to her. Then, if he admires her he can propose in due form. There is not the slightest occasion for her to know all that hinges on the proposal."

"I hate concealment!"

"It seems to me, Rose, you hate a great many things. Try to be calm, and tell me your own wishes?"

"I want Lord Dornton to refuse to marry Dolly. She is so bright and beautiful, Squire, and she longs for pleasures and pretty things. A little taste of money and luxury would make her so happy!"

The Squire smiled.

"You are a true woman. You think only of one side. You won't pity poor Dornton if he's left with only three or four hundred a year on which to keep up his title. You'd better go to bed and think over it. How young you look, Rose! You'd pass for five-and-twenty any day!"

In general, Miss Delaval was superior to compliments, but this one pleased her. Tired as she was she stood a long while before the looking-glass that night, trying hard to solve the question whether a wild scheme that had just entered her busy brain was capable of realisation.

She knew that she was plain—what some people would call ugly. So much the better for her plan; but was she young-looking. Could she, a woman of five-and-thirty, really attempt to pass for a much less age!

Rose summed up her good points. Her complexion was smooth and rosy as a girl's. Her figure was plump, but it was the plumpness which often accompanies youth rather than the matronly embosomment of middle age. There were silver threads in the front of her hair, but that mattered nothing.

I am afraid Squire Dugdale's guest got very little repose that night. She looked quite pale and tired when she appeared at breakfast.

"Well," said the host, in his genial tone.

"Have you thought things over?"

"I have."

"And come to a conclusion?"

"Yes, Dolly shall meet Lord Dornton and give him a fair chance of pleasing her. Perhaps you will kindly write to the lawyers for me."

"Certainly. What shall I say?"

"Say that Rose Delaval is residing with her aunt at Acacia Cottage, Rupert-road, West Kensington, and will be glad to make his acquaintance if he will call any day next week."

"I never saw such a good woman as you are, Rose!" said the old man, heartily; "you sacrifice the best years of your life to your niece, and then step back and give up all claim to her, when you see it's for her good."

Rose winced.

"Don't praise me!" she said, simply. "I can't bear it. Don't write the letter until I am on my way home, please!"

CHAPTER III.

CHAMBERS at the West-end, furnished with taste and luxury, a young man sitting at a small writing-table, a moody look on his handsome face as he tossed over a pile of letters.

"I wonder how many of these people will remember my existence when Miss Delaval is discovered, and from the master of Dornton Park and its rich revenues I become a plain country gentleman of nowhere in particular, with three hundred a-year for sole income? I declare I wish my cousin were found, and something settled. Anything would be better than this horrible suspense."

A small page tapped at the door and announced,—

"Mr. Dyason, my lord."

Lord Dornton started. It must surely be no slight cause which brought his family lawyer there at that hour. It was barely eleven o'clock. Mr. Dyason must have come straight from home; he could hardly have had time for more than a passing call at his office.

The two men shook hands; then, as the page closed the door, the Earl turned to his visitor.

"I am sure something has happened?"

"Yes."

"Good or bad? Don't keep me in suspense, Dyason; think of all there is at stake."

"I don't want to do so, my lord. I will tell you all I know; but I can't say whether you will call the tidings good or bad. Your cousin is found!"

Lord Dornton looked up quickly.

"Found—where?"

"It's the old story. We have been looking far afield for what was close at hand. While we have been scouring the country for her Miss Delaval has been residing at Kensington under the protection of her aunt."

"And you are sure of this?"

"Positive. My informant is Squire Dugdale, of Dugdale Castle. He says he has known her from a child, and she lived in his village until her grandfather's death, five years ago, when she and her aunt removed to London."

Lord Dornton groaned.

"And she is unmarried?"

"Decidedly; she has been educated in the greatest seclusion, and Mr. Dugdale writes has never been allowed any gentlemen acquaintance."

"A bread-and-butter schoolgirl!"

Mr. Dyason tried to be consoling.

"It might have been much worse, Lord Dornton. Evidently your cousin has been brought up as a lady. Being so young you will be able to train her to your own tastes, and form her mind."

The Earl threw up his hands.

"I never had any taste for the rôle of amateur schoolmaster. I am quite sure Miss Delaval will be odious, and we shall detest each other."

"Haden't you better wait until you have seen her before you make up your mind?"

"I hate the whole business."

"Perhaps you would prefer to resign everything. In that case, if your mind is made up to refuse Miss Delaval's hand, I see no good in your being introduced to her."

"I can't go so far as to say I am ready to resign everything! Fancy an earl without a family mansion, and with barely six pounds a week on which to maintain his dignity!"

"Lord Dornton, I wish you would be frank with me, in your own interests!"

"I am—astonishingly frank. I tell you the precise amount of my income if I refuse Miss Delaval!"

"I don't mean that! Is it your wish to come to an arrangement with the young lady?"

"I hardly understand!"

Mr. Dyason looked at him searchingly.

"Is it to matrimony in the abstract you have such an objection, Lord Dornton, or merely to wedding Miss Delaval?"

"I have old-fashioned notions, Dyason. I think a man should marry for love; and as I never have been in love, and feel not the slightest sign of becoming a victim to the tender passion, I would much rather leave matrimony alone!"

"Even were there no questions of the fortune, you owe it to your family to marry!"

"Hardly! I have a brother, a year younger than myself, who married a bishop's daughter, and enjoys a very comfortable living. There are two olive branches already in the vicarage nursery, so that the title of Dornton is in no danger of extinction!"

"If you really have an aversion to matrimony—?"

"I have!" interrupted the Earl, "under the conditions presupposed! I should hate to

pass my days with a woman who knew I had married for her fortune, and whom I was well aware had accepted me to secure the same!"

"I shouldn't wonder if you and Miss Delaval hit it off beautifully!"

"Fall in love to order, eh!"

"Not precisely! She has an aunt to whom she is much attached, and from whom she dreads to be separated. I think you will find a moderate allowance and the title of Countess would be far more appreciated by your cousin than the position of your constant companion. However, all that has yet to be arranged! When will you call upon Miss Delaval?"

"No time like the present! I will go this afternoon, and you had better come back to dinner, Dyason, and hear the result of the interview!"

It was about four when Lord Dornton drove down Rupert-road. All the other houses were in a flutter of excitement when they saw his elegant cab stop at the door of Acacia Cottage. Never before in the last five years had the little dwelling been known to have a visitor.

"Is Miss Delaval at home?"

Susan looked as though she thought the world was coming to an end, but she answered, respectfully, Miss Delaval was within.

"What name, sir?"

"Lord Dornton!"

Susan gasped, ushered him into the little drawing-room, and rushed upstairs, two steps at a time, to carry the news to her mistress.

"And I do believe," she said to a gossip that same evening, "Miss Delaval must have expected him, for I found her dressed out like a young girl for her first party—her that wears quiet greys and blacks, and mostly a little cap. Why, she'd a pale pink satin, all frilled and flounced, and a lot of little curls on the top of her head, which, I'll stake my word, were false!"

Lord Dornton felt a nameless aversion when he saw his destined bride. She looked years older than her age; her dress was too smart, her whole get-up too manifestly studied. Besides, there was so much of her; he admired tall, slender figures. Well, Rose Delaval was certainly tall, but she was so plump, her waist would have taken a long arm to encircle it.

"I think we hardly need an introduction!" she said, diffidently. "Your name has long been known to me, though I little guessed the circumstances under which we should meet."

This was intolerable. Why, the woman was actually alluding to his marrying her; the brazenness of the whole scene jarred on Dornton's every instinct!

"I should never have known you!" said the Earl coldly. "You do not in the least resemble your mother. I suppose you take after the Delavals."

"I suppose so."

Lord Dornton felt extremely awkward. He had come fully intending to introduce the subject of their union, but he had never expected to find his destined bride alone. Where was the aunt of whom he had heard so much? It would have been far easier to discuss future plans with her than with this marvellously composed young lady herself.

"I understood from Mr. Dugdale's letter to my lawyers that you had a relation with you. May I not see her?"

"I am very sorry, but she is not at home. If you could call to-morrow I should be delighted for her to see you."

This was better.

"You are very fond of her?"

"I think I may say that never were aunt and niece more fondly attached."

"It would doubtless be very painful for her to contemplate losing you?"

"It would be terrible for me to think of a separation from her," answered Rose Delaval with genuine feeling.

Lord Dornton thought of Mr. Dyason's hint, and breathed again.

"May I speak to you quite frankly?" he asked, "just as though we were discussing

the fate of other people instead of a question which concerns us both."

"I always prefer plain speaking," continued Rose Delaval, calmly. "I know that by your uncle's will you lose a handsome fortune if you refuse to marry his granddaughter. I am aware that if the refusal comes from her she derives no benefit from the Dornton property. It seems to me a most absurd will."

"I perfectly agree with you."

"No two people ever yet fell in love to order. It is monstrous to expect it!"

"I am very glad to find you so sensible, Miss Delaval. Now, you must understand what I say is meant in no disparagement to yourself. We are placed in a very embarrassing position, and I think it is best for both of us that we should understand each other from the first."

"Far best!"

"I don't like poverty!"

"And I am not attached to it."

"Precisely. Now I am perfectly fancy free. I have not the slightest desire to marry anyone; in fact, I never yet saw the woman with whom I could pass my life. Don't you think we might come to some amicable arrangement? Couldn't we be married and then separate? I would see that all fitting respect was paid you as Lady Dornton. I should give you the choice of my two country seats and half my income to keep up your dignity. I have been a wanderer all my life, so people would see nothing extraordinary in my roving about still. Of course, from time to time we could meet. Don't you think we should be far better friends by this plan than if we, caring nothing for each other, and knowing the motive which led to our marriage, set up housekeeping together, and tried to palm ourselves off on the world as a very attached couple?"

Rose Delaval paused. She seemed to be weighing his words.

"But if you ever wanted to marry anyone else?"

"I couldn't. I am quite willing to run the chance of that. The same risk would be encountered by you."

"No," said Rose, quietly. "I think not. A woman does not give her love till sought; and a wife who respects herself, even if she be a wife in name only, is not likely to be exposed to such seeking."

"You speak with wonderful knowledge of the world. It seems hard to realise that you are a mere child."

Miss Delaval did not consider it necessary to take any notice of this remark.

"Will you consider my proposal?" began Lord Dornton, gravely; "and let me know how you regard it?"

"I think," said his companion, slowly; "there is a great deal of sense in it, but I should like to think it over and consult my—relation."

"Certainly. When may I call again? Perhaps it would be more agreeable to you if your aunt and I discussed the business part of the arrangement—supposing, of course, that you are disposed to think favourably over my suggestions."

"It might be better. This is Tuesday. If you will call again on Saturday, Lord Dornton, I promise you you shall have your answer."

The Earl departed.

Miss Delaval retired to her own room, and (much to Susan's approval) changed the pink sateen for a plain black silk, and removed the obnoxious curls. Then she went downstairs.

"I have done no wrong," she muttered to herself, when conscience smote her for her deception. "I told him I was Rose Delaval, so I am. When it came to other things I spoke in the third person. I have a perfect right to take care of Dolly. I don't dislike the Earl nearly so much as I expected, but with his peculiar ideas about love he shall never have a chance of breaking my darling's heart."

"Oh, Miss Dolly!" exclaimed Susan, when the girl came in a little later. "Why weren't you at home before? There's been the grandest gentleman you ever saw!"

"To see us?"

"To see your aunt. Bless me, Miss Dolly, he came in a cab of his own, with the smartest little boy in buttons to drive it; and when I asked him his name he said he was Lord Dornton. Fancy me opening the door to a real nobleman! I declare you might have knocked me down with a feather!"

Miss Delaval knew from Dolly's face she had heard something, but she put off her disclosures till tea was over, then she asked, tenderly,—

"Dolly, do you ever think about your mother—your beautiful young mother who died when you were born?"

"Often, Aunt Rose. I don't miss her, you know, because you are so good to me; but I often wish I knew something about her."

Very simply Rose Delaval told the dead Hilda's story, and how she had given her little girl to her young sister-in-law's charge.

"Dolly, all these years I have been haunted by the fear of a parting from you. I thought your mother's kindred would be sure to claim you, and now the blow has fallen. The gentleman who came this afternoon is your cousin, Lord Dornton, and he wants to take you from me!"

"But he can't!" said Dolly composedly. "You are my aunt, and an aunt is a much nearer relation than a cousin!"

"But if it is for your good, Dolly!"

"I hate things that are for one's good! I daresay he's a horrible old man."

"He is not old at all Dolly—nine-and-twenty I think—and very handsome!"

"Then he'd have a horrid wife."

"He is not married. He came here this afternoon to ask you to be his wife!"

"Me!" said Dolly, in her amazement forgetting all rules of grammar. "Why, he must be mad, auntie. He has never even set eyes on me."

"I know!"

"I never mean to marry anyone!" said Dolly, promptly, "and certainly not an utter stranger. Don't you think yourself, auntie, my cousin must be mad?"

"No, dear!"

Dolly looked at her strangely.

"I do believe you want me to do it!"

"I think I do."

"Auntie!" and there were tears in the girl's eyes, "I would not have believed it of you. Fancy wanting me to marry a man I have never seen, just to be free of me! Oh! you are cruel—cruel!"

"Dolly, can't you trust me!"

Dolly dried her eyes.

"Was I ever unkind to you before?"

"Never, but —"

"But you can't understand this; I want to try and make it clear to you."

"You can't."

"I think I can. Your grandfather was a very rich man, and his two nearest relations were you and his nephew. His title must go to the latter—his estates and fortune he could leave to whom he pleased. He had loved your cousin as a son, but you were his own grandchild, and so he did not like to pass you quite over. I think myself it was a great mistake, but I daresay he believed it fair. He left all his vast property between you, on condition that you married each other."

"And if we refused?"

"The one who refused lost all. If Lord Dornton were unwilling to marry you he must resign all his uncle's property. If you refuse his hand, you must go on in this plain little house, in this same quiet life you find so dull."

Dolly sighed.

"I don't want to be married—and then I have never seen Lord Dornton."

"He proposes, Dolly, that you should be married, and retain your freedom."

"I don't understand."

"That you should be called Lady Dornton, and have a beautiful house, with servants, and horses and carriages, more money than you know how to spend, and your poor old aunt to take care of you."

"And my husband?" asked Dolly, comically.

"He would go his own way, retaining an ample share of his uncle's wealth. There would be not the slightest occasion for you to meet him. You could part at the church door, save that you bore a new name, and were rich instead of poor. I don't think being married would make any difference to you."

Dolly looked thoughtful.

"Then I shouldn't have to see him at all! It would be just as though he were dead and had left me his name and all his money!"

Miss Delaval was too truthful not to suggest the drawback Dolly had not seen.

"Only one thing, dear. While he lived, you could never marry anyone else."

"I shouldn't want to, auntie. I think the Earl has been very clever to think of such a way of dividing the property. I shall have you all to myself, and all the beautiful things we used to long for as well."

"And am I to tell Lord Dornton you consent?" asked Miss Delaval, anxiously.

"I think so; only, auntie, he must never ask to see me. I couldn't see him, it would make me feel hot all over; and he must wait three months."

"There is no need for you to see him, dear. Why do you want him to wait three months? It seems to me the matter would be far better settled at once!"

Dolly blushed crimson.

"I should like him to have time to think it over in case he might be sorry afterwards. Isn't it strange, auntie, I have never seen him? I never mean to see him, but I shouldn't like to feel he wanted to marry someone else and couldn't, just because I was his wife."

"I understand; he is coming on Saturday afternoon, Dolly."

"Then I shall go out."

When Lord Dornton saw his fiancée's aunt, he was astonished at the striking resemblance between them. The short curls, the finery, and the juvenile manner were missing, but otherwise, the quiet, middle-aged lady in black silk seemed the image of the girl in pink satin. He liked the aunt far better than he had done the niece.

Five minutes in her company told him she was a good, true-hearted woman, and he fell to wondering her training had not produced more attractive results in his objectionable cousin.

"Your niece has doubtless told you the result of our interview?" he began.

"I have heard all about it, Lord Dornton. Perhaps I consider my child's happiness more than yours, but I must confess I am in favour of the match."

"I think it is for my advantage too. You see, madam, I was brought up to think myself my uncle's heir. I have no profession, I must confess to fastidious tastes and expensive habits. I don't think I could endure life with an income of three hundred a year, and I shall be very glad if I am spared the necessity of trying."

Aunt Rose sighed.

"My niece is perfectly willing to consent to your proposed plan on two conditions."

"I hope they are easy of fulfilment."

"Very. The first is, that you part at the church door and never seek to become acquainted with her either before or after your wedding-day."

"I should have preferred our relations to be on a more friendly footing. I thought we might be fairly intimate as—cousins."

"I think she is right. The child has a proud nature, and she declares she must be to you all or nothing!"

"I will bow to her decision, Miss Delaval,

and can only hope the other condition is equally simple."

"It is more so. She wishes three months to elapse before your wedding-day!"

"I don't like that," said Lord Dornton quietly. "I would much rather have settled things at once."

"So would I," admitted his hostess; "but she says it is not fair on you—that you ought to have a chance of being able to change your mind."

Lord Dornton smiled.

"I ought to know my own mind at nine-and-twenty. My cousin is eleven years younger, and she seems to have no fears for herself."

"She is inflexible on these two points. Perhaps you would prefer to think over them?"

"No, I don't think so. It will be a relief to know the matter is arranged. I think, Miss Delaval, as we are now so nearly at the end of June, I will ask your niece to fix our wedding for the first of October. I propose to settle the Yorkshire estate on her and the half of my income. Regarding her other wish, I pledge you my word never to foist myself on her notice. Indeed, I will send down my solicitor to make all the needful arrangements lest another visit from myself might prove distasteful to my cousin. Mine is a singular position, Miss Delaval, to be on the eve of marriage with a girl whose one desire is to have nothing to do with me."

"There are a great many strange marriages nowadays," remarked the spinster, gravely; "and really, Lord Dornton, some of them turn out remarkably well."

"I hope mine may be of the number!" was the Earl's rejoinder, and then he took his leave.

CHAPTER IV.

DOLLY really seemed very little altered by the fact of her engagement. It was true, when she reflected the first of October would make her a Countess, she grew rather grave, but in a general way she was just the same sunny-tempered child who had so long brightened Acacia Cottage.

Mr. Dyason appeared in good time, and saw the two Rose Delavals together. He promptly took the younger to his heart at once. He had managed the Dornton estates for years, and remembered poor pretty Hilda, whom he assured Dolly was her own image.

"The first of October, at All Saints, Margaret-street, at nine o'clock," was the message he took back to Lord Dornton. "Miss Delaval alone accompanies her niece. I am to give the bride away, and both ladies hope you will allow the ceremony to be entirely of a private character!"

The Earl shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope it will be a fine day. If it's at all dark I shall run the risk of marrying the aunt instead of the niece, for I am sure it's hard enough to see the difference at any time!"

Mr. Dyason started.

"I find not the slightest resemblance between them," he said stiffly. "Miss Delaval may be a charming woman, but your future wife is a beauty!"

"I shouldn't have said so! Well, Dyason, have you settled everything, or have you to make another journey to Acacia Cottage?"

"It would be a fruitless one. The cottage is to be deserted after to-morrow; Miss Delaval takes her niece to Westmoreland, where they remain until the first week in September, when they come to town to prepare for the wedding!"

This was not precisely true. Miss Delaval had talked before the lawyer of the beauties of Westmoreland, and also said she was going to spend some months in the country, but there was no connection between the statements.

"Where shall we go, Dolly?" asked the kind aunt when Mr. Dyason had departed. "I want you to have a pleasant time, dear!"

"Not to Westmoreland!" said Dolly, who had been reading a society paper that day, which announced Lord Dorn-ton would shortly lead to the hymeneal altar his beautiful and accomplished cousin, Rose Delaval; "not where anyone knows us!"

"Why not?"
Dolly blushed.

"I don't want to be pointed at as the girl who is going to be a countess, and Delaval is such an uncommon name. Couldn't we call ourselves something else? That's why I don't want to go to Westmoreland! I'd much rather be somewhere we had neither of us ever been before, and you know we need not think about money now!"

This was true. Lord Dorn-ton had bequeathed five hundred pounds for the express purpose of purchasing a trousseau for his grandchild, and buying anything she might fancy.

The day after Dolly's consent to the engagement the money reached her in crisp bank-notes, and the child decided a little of it might well be spent in making the last three months of her maiden life something to remember gladly.

Miss Delaval yielded—in point of fact she mostly did yield—so instead of that talked-of expedition to Brighton or Margate, the two Roses found themselves in a pretty cottage covered with roses in a lovely Yorkshire village, with Flamborough Head raising its lofty peak above them, and all the delights of Scarborough within easy reach.

It was charming! Miss Rose (for Dolly's whim had been carried out, and the tell-tale Delaval been dropped) and her niece hired a pretty pony carriage; they sailed round the head in a pleasure boat; they climbed the peak and saw the lighthouse; they went to Scarborough for a taste of gaiety; in fact, for two weeks their device of a summer habitation proved a brilliant success; then a telegram came from Dugdale Castle. The heir had returned suddenly, and was lying at the point of death. The Squire implored Rose Delaval to come to him.

Finding her aunt in tears, Dolly insisted on learning the cause. It came out then. She and George Dugdale had been plighted lovers once, their wedding-day fixed, when a woman who had been the curse of the young man's life, who had entrapped him into a marriage when he was a mere boy, and whom he had long believed dead—appeared upon the scene. The sorrowful romance was never published to the world.

George Dugdale went abroad; Rose Delaval buried her blighted hopes, and now he had come home and lay a-dying.

"You must go to him at once."

It was Dolly who spoke, and her eyes were wet with tears. Really, for a girl who did not believe in love, and meant to pass her life without it, she showed a great amount of sympathy for her aunt.

"But how can I leave you, or take you to such a house of sadness?"

"I shall stay here."

"Dolly!"

"I should only be in the way there, and I have been first with you so many years, auntie, I don't think I could bear to see myself second. I shall stay here."

"But at your age—alone?"

"I don't think harm *could* come to anyone that you know, auntie. Mrs. Marshall called yesterday, and you might commend me to her care if you really won't believe I can take care of myself."

Mrs. Marshall was the Rector's wife. She mostly patronised the tenants of Shell Cottage by a call, but she had felt drawn to Miss Rose and her niece the moment she saw them, and the call Dolly referred to had been meant in real friendship.

Moreover, the widowed landlady of Shell Cottage was a gentlewoman, so between them—her and Mrs. Marshall—Dolly would not be neglected.

Miss Rose called at the Rectory and ex-

plained she was suddenly summoned to a friend's deathbed, and could not take Dolly. Would Mrs. Marshall kindly help the girl if any difficulty arose? And then, leaving fifty pounds in the Rector's hands for any sudden necessities that might arise, Rose Delaval, the elder, took a sobbing farewell of her darling, and set off for Appleby, hoping she might be in time for a parting word with her life's love.

It must be confessed Dolly felt very dull. She had never been alone in her life save for those three days following her last birthday, and solitude was not to her taste. It was a real comfort to her when Mrs. Marshall came in the second day after her aunt had left, and proposed she should spend the afternoon at the Rectory.

"We are very quiet people, but it will be better perhaps than a lonely evening," she said, kindly. And Dolly, who had never taken a meal in another person's house, since she left Westmoreland five years before, was quite elated, and accepted the invitation gratefully.

She looked a pretty picture, as she followed her hostess up the well-kept drive. And yet her toilet was simple to a degree—only a white washing dress, and a broad blue sash.

But for her tall, graceful figure she would have looked a child of ten. As it was, she seemed a mere girl; no one could ever have guessed from looking at her, that in a few weeks' time she was to be a countess.

"Henry!" said Mrs. Marshall to her husband; "this is Miss Rose. I thought it would be more cheerful for her to come to us than spend a lonely evening at Shell Cottage."

"I am delighted to see you, Miss Rose!" said the old man, with stately courtesy. "Ada, who do you think has come down to surprise us? My old friend and pupil, Kenneth Devreux."

Mrs. Marshall started.

"I thought he had come into a fortune, and all London had gone wild after him!"

"I don't think so. I told him we had heard romantic tales about him, but he looked so grave I had to leave off all attempts to question him. He is in the spare-room making a hasty toilet. I'll go and tell him you've come in."

Mrs. Marshall turned to Dolly with a quick explanation.

"Mr. Devreux is an old pupil of my husband's. He lived with us for about a year before he went to college, and we now love him dearly."

"How glad you must be he has come!"

She could not say more, for the Rector and his guest came back. Mrs. Marshall greeted her favourite affectionately, and introduced him to Dolly.

It occurred to the young man that somewhere or other he had seen Miss Rose before. He could not explain the fact, but every feature of her face was familiar to him.

"Oh, no!" said Dolly, when he ventured to hint at this. "I am quite sure I never saw you before."

"It might have been abroad. I have been a sad wanderer—just a passing glimpse of you that you never knew of!"

Dolly shook her head.

"I have never been out of England, and I have only been in a train twice since I can remember. Aunt Rose hates travelling!"

The evening passed very pleasantly; they had tea in the pretty flower-scented garden, and then, when they went indoors, at Mrs. Marshall's request Dolly went to the piano and sang some pathetic old English ballads, which brought the tears to the eyes of the old couple as they listened.

"You must come again soon!" said the Rector's wife, as she wrapped her guest in a soft crimson shawl. "It has been such a treat to have you!"

"And to me to come!" said Dolly, simply. "It is more than five years since I went out to tea!"

"Have you forsworn the society of your fellow creatures, then?" asked Kenneth Devreux, with a smile, as they passed out into the July night together—for he had substituted himself for the Rectory cook as Dolly's escort back to Shell Cottage.

"Oh, no! but we never had any friends after we went to London."

"You must have been very lonely?"

"No; I had my aunt."

"Is she with you at Shell Cottage?"

"Oh, no! She went away yesterday to see someone who is very ill."

"And left you all alone?"

"She could not help it."

"Don't you find it dull?"

"A little."

"Are you fond of boating? Would you let me take you for a row to-morrow?"

"I should like it dearly, but—"

He was annoyed at her hesitation.

She looked such a child—surely she has not pride enough to object to such a simple pleasure.

"But I am a stranger to you. Is that what you were going to say?"

"Oh, no, I never thought of that; I meant it didn't seem kind to Mrs. Marshall. She and the Rector are so pleased to have you, and it wouldn't be fair to take you away."

Kenneth smiled.

"Mrs. Marshall has a sewing class on Friday afternoon, and the Rector writes his sermons, so I assure you, Miss Rose, I shall be reduced to a lonely expedition if you refuse me your society."

Dolly blushed and promised to be ready by three o'clock, forgetting his lordship the Earl of Dorn-ton and his claims on her allegiance entirely.

"That is a pretty child," said Kenneth, carelessly, to the Rector, as they sat smoking later on that night.

"Very," said Mrs. Marshall, "and the aunt is an admirable woman. She subscribes most handsomely to all our charities, though she has been here hardly a fortnight."

"I wonder she cared to leave her niece alone."

"She couldn't help herself; she was afraid of infection if she took her with her, and Mrs. Marshall promised to have an eye to her. Dolly has been delicate, it seems, and Miss Rose did not like to send her back to their London home in this sultry weather. I think she was very cute. This fine Yorkshire air will make another creature of the child."

"She seemed so lonely I proposed to take her for a row to-morrow. I suppose we couldn't persuade Mrs. Marshall to come with us?"

The Rector laughed at the bare idea.

"Mrs. Marshall hasn't been on the water since we lived here. It's very kind of you to think of giving Miss Rose a pleasure, but I fear my wife won't share it."

"I suppose no one can say anything?"

The Rector started.

"My dear fellow, this is not a place for scandal-mongers. The girl is a pure-minded innocent child, and you are an honest man; this will have to be a more spiteful village by far than it is before people remark on your spending an hour together without the vigilant eye of a chaperon upon you."

Mr. Devreux agreed at once, and forthwith adopted the Rector's view; in fact, he put a most literal construction on Mr. Marshall's word, for instead of spending an hour with Dolly, it soon came that he passed all his leisure with her.

Miss Rose was still detained at her friend's death-bed. Dolly had become a sort of adopted child at the Rectory, and as Kenneth seemed like a son of the house it was hardly strange that the two young people were thrown a great deal together.

They went long solitary walks together; together they ascended Flamborough Head, then they played croquet in the Rectory garden, or took delicious sails on the German Ocean. Their amusements were innocent and varied, but always enjoyed in company, and Mrs.

Marshall looked on complacently. To her it seemed only a boy and girl friendship. She thought it just an innocent acquaintance, and but for her husband might never have felt a pang of alarm.

"Ada!" said the Rector, suddenly one day, "where's Kenneth?"

"Sketching on Flamborough Head, dear. He took his lunch, and will not be home till evening."

"And where's Dolly?" (the formal Miss Rose had been quite dropped at the Rectory, long before this).

"She went too!"

Mr. Marshall put on his spectacles and looked grave at his wife.

"Ada, it seems to me, we've made an awful blunder!"

"Henry!"

"We've left these two as much together as though they were brother and sister. If ever young people had place, time and opportunity given to them for falling in love, you and I have giving all these to Kenneth and little Dolly."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Marshall, but she looked troubled for all that. "Dolly is nothing but a child, Kenneth must be years older."

"Ten years or more I grant you, but, Ada, when I proposed to you, you didn't think fifteen years an inseparable barrier to our being lovers."

"And you think those two have fallen in love?"

"I hope not, but I am afraid; and if they had, I think a big portion of the blame is ours."

"What will Miss Rose say?"

"What will Kenneth's family say? His Uncle might disinherit him."

"Perhaps they haven't done so," said poor Mrs. Marshall, who would persist in talking of falling in love, as though it were a tangible action which befell people at some particular moment, before which period they were safe, after which all was hopeless.

"I hope not."

"I'll talk to Dolly!"

"Pray don't!" said Mr. Marshall quickly. "Let's hope the poor child doesn't suspect anything. I'll say a word to Kenneth, to-night."

And he did, did it as cleverly as though he had been the most consummate actor, instead of a simple, kind old man.

"I heard from Miss Rose this afternoon, Kenneth; I expect Dolly found a letter too, when she got home, her aunt is coming back next week."

He looked at the young man keenly, and Kenneth felt uncomfortable.

"I think I shall have to leave you next week, Mr. Marshall. This has been a charming visit, I have enjoyed it enormously, I assure you."

"Small thanks to us I fancy, hasn't Dolly been the chief charm of the time, Kenneth?"

Mr. Devreux grew white to the very lips. For one moment he hesitated; then he held up his head, and said, frankly,—

"She has; but on my word of honour I never suspected it till this moment. I feel ashamed of myself, but I'll repair the mischief as much as I can. I say good-bye to her to-morrow, and go back to London!"

"Poor little girl!"

"She doesn't know," said Kenneth, hoarsely. "I have spoiled my own life's happiness, but I have never said a word of my feelings. She can't know, poor child, that I love her!"

"But not well enough to marry her."

"I am engaged, man!"

Mr. Marshall rose, and was going to leave the room, a muttered imprecation on his lips, of which Kenneth caught but one word,—

"Scoundrel!"

"Hear me out," he pleaded. "My defence is weak enough, but at least listen to it. When my uncle died—"

"Do you mean he is dead? I had not the remotest idea of it!"

"He died last spring."

"Then you are free to please yourself?"

"I am not free. I am bound to marry a wife of his selection—or be penniless."

"And you consented?"

"I did. I had never seen a woman I could love; I thought it easy to pass my life without love. I consented."

"And your fiancée?"

"On that point we were agreed; she too, did not believe in love. We resolved to be married and part at the church door—to trouble each other no more."

"And knowing this you could come here under a false name?"

"Spare me that reproach, Mr. Marshall, for it is undeserved. I am Kenneth Devreux. When I found you had not heard of my uncle's death I did not feel bound to tell you of it. I assure you I care very little for my honours. I was happier far in the old days, when I was plain Mr. Devreux."

"Anyway, you knew you were engaged to another woman when you made love to Dolly?"

"But I never did make love to her. Until you spoke to me to-night, I thought my feeling was friendship."

"Poor child!"

"I never meant to harm her."

"Then go away without seeing her again; let her believe all this was only friendship—if she can."

Kenneth promised, and he honestly meant to keep his word. But the next morning, wandering by the shore, he came upon Dolly seated on a rug, her eyes bent on the foaming ocean, her thoughts far away. In her hand she held a letter, and it was plain she had been crying.

Kenneth Devreux forthwith forgot his promise. He went up to the girl, and took her hand.

"Dolly, what is the matter?"

"Aunt Rose is coming home on Monday!" said Dolly, gravely, "and I am very glad!"

"You don't seem glad!"

"I am; I want to see her!"

"Then why have you been crying?"

"I don't know—at least, I mean it's nothing you can help!"

"Try me!"

And he sat down beside her, just as though that conversation with the Rector the night before had never been.

"You can't help it!" said Dolly, sadly; "only this is August. September will soon be here, and then October!"

Kenneth had reasons of his own for not desiring the arrival of October; but really he could not understand anyone else lamenting that it was the next month to September.

"But, Dolly, why do you worry over that? Of course October will be here soon, and that means winter; but spring will come back, and summer too!"

"I should like it to be always summer!" said Dolly, slowly. "I love the sunshine and the flowers, and this is such a pretty place. I have been so happy here!"

So had Kenneth, but he dared not tell her that; he only said soothingly,—

"Your aunt will bring you again—next year, perhaps—and then it will be just as pretty, and the flowers and the summer sunshine will be here waiting to welcome you!"

"You don't understand. I shall never come back here—I am going to be married in October!"

He had been able to contemplate leaving her, and giving his name to another woman; but he could not brook even the idea of Dolly herself being married, and not to him. She was such a child. He was sure her heart was not in the engagement.

"That is great news! And are you happy?"

"No! I am miserable!"

"Poor child!"

"You see," said Dolly, slowly, "I have never seen him!"

"Never seen the man you are going to marry!" exclaimed Kenneth. "You must be joking?"

"It is no joking matter! You see we were very poor, and auntie thought it would be such a good thing for me!"

"And is he fond of you?"

"Didn't I tell you he had never seen me? He is a very good man—at least auntie says so. Mr. Devreux, don't you hate good people?"

"Yes!"

A long, long pause.

"You mustn't do it, Dolly. You are such a child! You don't know what a life you would be choosing. You would make your future one long pain!"

"I know."

"You had better write to the fellow and break it off!"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I have promised to marry him, and I never broke my word in my life!"

"Dolly, would you despise anyone who broke their word?"

Dolly looked thoughtful.

"Wouldn't it be wrong of them?"

Kenneth's mind was quite made up now. He threw over Rose Delaval and wealth composedly. His future, henceforward, meant three hundred a-year and Dolly, if only she would agree to dismiss her unknown suitor.

"Supposing it was a promise which would make a man miserable to keep?"

"How!"

"I promised to marry someone I do not love—just as you did. Dolly, I am going to tell her that our marriage would be a wretched one, and I should make her miserable, so she must let me free. Can't you do the same?"

"But Aunt Rose!"

"Leave her to me."

"She doesn't know you!"

"Listen, Dolly. When I have got my freedom I shall come back and see your aunt. I shall tell her I can give you no wealth or luxury, but I love you with all the strength of my heart. I think she will yield then, Dolly, and let me marry you."

"But—"

"But I have never asked you! I ask you now, sweetheart, in all earnestness, will you be my much-loved wife?"

"It's very wrong, you know!" confessed Dolly, with a blush; "because we both belong to someone else. But I am sure I could never be happy with anyone but you!"

"And I should be miserable without my child-love. Dolly, I will go to town to-night and not return until I can stand before your aunt a free man, and plead for her darling's hand. But Dolly, will you also send your ennoblement to the rightabout?"

"My what?"

"Your ennoblement—the gentleman you have never seen, but who yet has the assurance to believe you will marry him in October?"

Dolly smiled encouragingly.

"I will write to him!"

"Don't make the letter too charming, sweetheart, or he might insist on keeping you to your promise!"

"Mr. Marshall," said Kenneth, when he joined the Rector and his wife at lunch. "You were quite right last night. Poverty and love are worth more than misery and riches. I am going to London to shake off my fetters. I shall return soon to plead my cause with Miss Rose. Please let me be plain Kenneth Devreux to her and her niece until I can explain myself to them."

CHAPTER V.

LORD DONSTON called at Acacia Cottage and cross-examined the caretaker; but she denied all knowledge of Miss Delaval's movements. She did hear the ladies had gone to the seaside, but she wasn't sure.

The Earl went next to Mr. Dyason; but the moment the lawyer heard his plans he refused all assistance, and hinted pretty plainly that he should resign the management of the Dornton estates if his client persisted in his dishonourable conduct.

"Resign away!" laughed the Earl; "it won't hurt me. You forget, Dyason, from the moment I accomplish what you term my 'dishonourable conduct' I have no estate to manage; all that was mine passes to Miss Delaval. She loses nothing but an empty title."

"She would have been the loveliest countess in England."

"I fear our taste in beauty differs. I see nothing in the young lady."

Mr. Dyason tossed his head.

"Well, Dyason, will you give me Miss Delaval's address?"

"I haven't got it."

"I suppose a letter sent to Acacia Cottage would be forwarded?"

"All letters sent there are forwarded to Squire Dugdale. I believe he regards your cousin as a grandchild, so he will know how to avenge her wrongs."

This was not encouraging. Lord Dornton did not feel inclined for his letter to Rose Delaval to run the gauntlet of Mr. Dugdale's inspection; he therefore wrote to the Squire, begging him to forward his cousin's address. Then, fuming at the delay—for this was his third day in London—he called at his club to see if any letters awaited him. A goodly pile, but one which struck his attention first—perhaps because it bore the Scarborough postmark, and Scarborough was near Dolly—an innocent-looking letter enough, in a plain white envelope, with neither monogram or crest, and directed in a round hand, rather pretty, and very clear.

He opened it slowly, wondering who was the writer, and found that the note hardly covered the first page, and bore neither date nor address.

"DEAR COUSIN,—

"I hope you will forgive me, but I cannot marry you, as I like someone else a great deal better. I am very sorry if I have caused you any inconvenience, and I trust you will be as happy with all the Dornton property as I know we shall be without it.—Yours very truly,—

"ROSE DELAVAL."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Earl, with a sigh of relief. "Now I can return to Dolly with a position fit for her acceptance. As to my cousin I need feel no remorse; that little 'we' in the last sentence speaks like volumes. Rose, like myself, has found out love is better than money. Well, if the happy again is poor, it shall be my first object to settle a handsome portion on the bride; and now I'll drive to King's Cross and catch the Marton train."

It was far too late to present himself at the Rectory that night. He slept at the village inn, and surprised his friends the next day as they were setting down to breakfast.

"Congratulate me!" he cried. "I am a free man, and can face Dolly's aunt with courage, for I can offer her darling not only a coronet, but wealth!"

Mrs. Marshall smiled.

"I don't think the aunt will be obdurate. Would you believe it, she has just made a romantic match herself?"

"The aunt!"

"Well, she was only thirty-five, and looked less. It seems her lover had been abroad for years—came home to die."

"Then it was his deathbed she left Dolly to go off to?"

"Yes, and he persuaded her to marry him that she might be his heiress—and then he actually recovered!"

"And are they here—the happy pair?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Dugdale. They are at Shell Cottage, and Dolly is delighted."

Kenneth went to Shell Cottage in the afternoon, and sent in his card in due form. He had not long to wait. A handsome stalwart

man with the traces of recent illness came to greet him.

"My wife and her niece are so afraid to face you that I have taken the onus of the explanation on myself."

"Afraid of me?"

"Are you not Lord Dornton?"

"Assuredly."

"Well, my wife deceived you, I confess, but she did it with a pious motive. Wanting her niece to be your wife, and yet to escape all share of your life, she played the rôle of Rose Delaval."

"I don't understand."

"They were namesakes. There are—I mean there were—two Rose Delavals."

"And I saw them both?"

"You saw the same one in two rôles."

Kenneth smiled.

"Well, it matters very little if I saw the wrong Miss Delaval, for the right one has written to break off her engagement to me."

"And you came here to force her to fulfil it?"

"Oh, dear, no!" and it was Kenneth's turn to look annoyed. "I wouldn't annoy my cousin for the world. In fact, I am in love with someone else."

"Then I confess I cannot understand the object of your visit."

"I am bewildered myself! I am in love with Dolly, and I certainly believed that Miss Rose—I mean Miss Dugdale—was her guardian."

Mr. Dugdale laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"I never heard of anything being so comical!"

"I can't see it," said Kenneth, stiffly. "I must beg you, when you have recovered from your extraordinary hilarity, to give me Miss Rose's address, and tell me where she has taken Dolly."

"The fact is, Lord Dornton, there is a muddle all round; that is, if you are the person Dolly has spoken to us of as Mr. Devreux."

"I was christened Kenneth, and my family name is Devreux."

"Just so. Well, my wife's niece was christened Rose, and called Dolly to distinguish her from her aunt. As a matter of fact, my lord, Mr. Devreux has been making love to the very young lady from whose charms Lord Dornton was so thankful to escape, and Dolly Rose has accepted the suitor Rose Delaval renounced."

Kenneth looked bewildered.

"Then you mean that Dolly—"

"She shall come and answer for herself. I'm afraid it's a fact her true name is Rose Delaval. Still, if you object to the combination, I dare say you can persuade her to change the Delaval at an early date, and let you continue to substitute Dolly for Rose."

Reader, he persuaded her. And now, instead of there being two Rose Delavals, no one answers to that name now, for the elder Rose is Mrs. Dugdale, mistress of Dugdale Castle, and the sunshine of the old man's life; while the younger flower is the Countess Dornton, a most bewitching young matron, and the beauty of two or three seasons, the darling of her husband's heart, the favourite of the county. Amid all her prosperity and happiness, she likes to reflect with tender pride that when Kenneth loved her first she was only DOLLY.

[THE END.]

SPIDERS—A German entomologist, F. Dahl, claims that spiders have perfect sight only at very short distances. Their sense of touch is consequently remarkably well developed. Their smell is so good that they can distinguish odours, and their hearing is excellent. Some of them show a remarkable instinct in building their webs—even their first—in perfect geometrical form. A reflective power is evinced by their refusal of kinds of tough insects which have been once attacked unsuccessfully.

NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOURS.

—O—

WHEN Mrs. Chatterton, a very pretty young widow, with one little boy, bought a small cottage at B—, and came there to reside, she thought it an earthly paradise; but Satan entered in paradise, and the very first day that little Roland Chatterton went out to play, a great dog jumped the hedge which divided his mother's garden from her neighbour's, and barked and growled most terribly at the small man in petticoats and red stockings, who at once flew to his mother with piteous wails and shrieks of terror.

Mrs. Chatterton caressed her child, placed him in safety in the middle of her bed, and rushed out into the garden, armed with a curtain pole, to expel the intruder. He was there still, and had frightened the little servant, in a white cap, who was called Roland's nursemaid, to such a degree that she had climbed a vine trellis, and clung to it half way up, crying piteously. Meanwhile, a man of portly habit, and so well dressed that, but for his disgusting conduct, Mrs. Chatterton would have considered him a gentleman, stood on the other side of the hedge, laughing.

"All he wants to do is to lick your hand, young woman," this masculine individual was saying. "He's the best-tempered fellow. Come down and be friends with him."

"I can't, sir!" squealed the little maid. "I'm that afraid, I shall die, sir! I had a cousin died of hydrophobia, sir! O-o-h! Oh! He's a climbing up after me!"

Mrs. Chatterton, though mortally afraid of the dog herself, was determined not to quail before these insolent intruders. She advanced slowly.

"Call your dog away, sir," she said. "The brute has already nearly frightened my son into convulsions. Now he attacks my servants. No doubt I shall be the next victim. Call him off!"

"Here, Leo!" cried the gentleman.

Leo heard, and obeyed reluctantly.

"Come down, child," said Mrs. Chatterton.

"It is most shocking that we should have this to bear. Is that your dog, sir?"

"That is my dearest friend Leo," replied the portly gentleman; "and allow me to tell you, madam, that he is worth any ten men, and all the women I have ever had the misfortune to meet. The young person is quite safe. Why doesn't she come down?"

Mrs. Chatterton, conscious that the dignity of the situation was not increased by the great exhibition of stocking which Sophy was making, repeated her commands. The maid descended and rushed into the house, uttering a wild shriek; and Mrs. Chatterton turned to the dog's master.

"Sir," she said, "as I cannot permit my only son's life to be perpetually in danger, I must request you never to allow that dog to enter my garden again."

"I'll request him not to do so," replied the gentleman. "He's partial to a bit of fun, though. He's like me in that. It is his sense of the ridiculous, I am sure, that brings him here. If you will climb trees when he appears, he may think it too good a joke to lose. He may insist on coming."

"A dog who would behave like that would prove himself mad," replied Mrs. Chatterton. "I am quite as averse to hydrophobia as Sophy is. I shall think it my duty to shoot him if he trespasses on my grounds again."

Mrs. Chatterton did not own a pistol, and could not have fired one if she had, but the threat enraged the stout gentleman.

"Perhaps you would like to shoot me also?" he said. "Observe, madam, I am on my own grounds, not on yours. I have my own opinion of any one who can take a dislike to a noble animal like that, who can repulse his offers of affection. I begin to doubt the creature's sagacity. Generally he makes no mistakes. Why he should make advances to a cowardly little milkop of a boy and a drivelling idiot

of a maid-servant I am sure I can't guess. Come, Leo. Madam, I advise you to take your family to Dr. Pasteur as soon as possible. Good-morning."

"The insolent wretch!" gasped Mrs. Chatterton.

"Oh! aint he, mum?" gasped Sophy, at the door.

"I'd a mind to souse him with b'iling water!" called cook, from the kitchen window. "Oh! but he's the devil, that's what he is—bad luck to him!"

The individual thus described was not yet too far away to overhear, and he grinned sardonically.

People said of Mr. Sutphen that he had been jilted in his youth, and had hated women ever since. Certainly they were right about the women. He could see no good in any of them, and when they offended him he behaved most horribly, as in this present instance.

And this was a nice beginning for two neighbours; especially for Mrs. Chatterton, who had never before been treated with any discourtesy, and who was used to look upon men as her natural protectors and admirers. It gave her a new sensation, and a most unpleasant one, to be addressed in that fashion, to be looked at as Mr. Sutphen had looked at her.

Then he had called her son, her baby yet in petticoats, a cowardly milk-sop! Considering the exhibition of stockings she did not feel much sympathy for Sophy; still he had behaved like a brute to the girl.

She longed to punish him, and she could not see her way to it. However, she had a gate opened into the other road, that she might not always be obliged to pass his windows in going out. From this time the widow and the bachelor lived in a state of warfare only possible to country neighbours. There was always a cow or a chicken, a goose or a turkey to quarrel over.

The bachelor had his washing and ironing done at home by his servant who tied his clothes-line to the branch of an old tree which grew on Mrs. Chatterton's side of the dividing hedge.

Mrs. Chatterton waited until all the shirts and stockings were hung up, and then bade Sophy untie the rope.

Sophy cut it, and all the garments lay upon the ground. Mr. Sutphen consulted a lawyer, and Mrs. Chatterton had a bill for "clothes line, and damage to garments" presented to her, which she paid.

It was only one of a thousand annoyances, and this went on for a full year at least; everybody in the village knew about it, and everybody blamed the old bachelor; but, curiously enough, a great attachment had sprung up between the original cause of the quarrel—the great Newfoundland dog, Prince Leo, and the widow's little boy, Roland, who had now got into knickerbockers, and had his long curls cut.

The heads of the opposing armies should have interfered, but they did not. They pretended not to know anything about it.

There was a deep pond, almost a lake, hard by the little cluster of cottages of which Mrs. Chatterton's was one, and Roland had been forbidden to go near it alone. Alas! when his hair was cropped and his skirts put away the baby vanished for ever. Roly became a boy. And he not only went to the lake alone, but went there to paddle about in the water. One day he was missed.

Sophy had lingered at her glass awhile in view of the arrival of the young butcher. A great terror seized upon the mother. She flew towards the pond.

As he saw her coming, naughty Roland ran further into the water and lost his footing. He was drowning—drowning before her eyes. She could not swim, but rushed in after him, shrieking loudly.

Instantly a man rushed across the sand. A dog passed him, and flew into the water.

Mr. Sutphen was the man, Prince Leo the

dog. The former brought out the lady, the latter the little boy.

But for their promptitude both would have been drowned, and as soon as Mrs. Chatterton felt sure they were not, she knelt down at Leo's side and kissed him on his good brown nose.

"You dear thing, I love you," said she; "and you, sir, my eternal gratitude is yours."

After this peace reigned between the cottagers. Offerings of roses from the gentleman, and of custards from the lady, brought on calls and tea-drinkings—of course, at Mrs. Chatterton's house. And one day, while they sat opposite each other, with Roly between them, and Prince Leo at his master's feet, Mr. Sutphen remarked,—

"This is very nice. I should like to be so always."

Mrs. Chatterton blushed.

"Should you?" he asked. "I'll be very good to Roland. I love him dearly."

"And I'll be very good to Prince Leo," she said, "and—to you."

So it was settled.

M. K.

LITTLE TIM.

—o—

OLD Aunt Jane sat beside her apple-stall all day thinking of poor sick Barney at home, and hoping little Anne, the daughter of the laundress in the next room, would not forget to see to him a little.

At dusk she hastened home to don her best, happy if she had money enough for the "sup of tay," the liniment, the medicine, and the bit to lay over for "the rint."

Aunt Jane was kind to everybody, but kindest of all to little Tim Barron—Lame Tim, the shoeblack, who had his box in the doorway not far off. Her interest in him began on the day when a big ruffian stole his stock-in-trade, broke his crutch, and beat him with the pieces, and left him bleeding in the alley-way.

Aunt Jane had her hands full with Barney and the rent, but she helped the little orphan home to her room, nursed him well, and set him up in his business again close to her stall, where many a rosy apple fell to his share, and, what the boy was more thankful for still, many a kind word, such as a mother might have given to her child.

It was Aunt Jane, too, who interviewed old Mr. Raleigh, the philanthropist, and a trustee of a certain great charity, and got Tim taken into a great school, where boys were trained at once for scholars and farmers.

So Tim went away, and Jane kept her stall as before, and had the usual up and down luck, until one bitter winter everything seemed to turn fairly against her.

Poor old Barney died, and his funeral was a great expense. "The bits of things" were sold, and Jane went to lodge with little Anne's mother, but her heart was heavy. And she made mistakes, and was robbed and cheated of apples and sweets. And at last, one Saturday night, when she had what she called the "week's makings" in her pocket, a strange young man, well-dressed, bought a dozen oranges, and gave her a half-sovereign to change.

She gave him every penny in her pocket, besides the oranges, and discovered an hour after that the money was counterfeit. It was a rainy night, and, overheated by excitement, she caught a heavy cold and fell into pneumonia.

Anne's mother was a close woman, and poor besides. She could not afford to keep a lodger who could not pay for the last week's rent, and was to be ill the coming one. She sent Jane to the hospital.

That was the end of all the poor soul's independence—the one thing she had prided herself on. She had not a friend who could help her; and so, after such a struggle with starvation as people seldom come out of alive,

she was considered lucky in being sent to the workhouse.

All this was slow in coming about, and it was just ten years from the day on which she had bought Little Lame Tim his new blacking box, that, bowed with shame, she took her place amongst paupers—she who had been so industrious and so proud.

Hot tears fell over the wrinkled face. She was very miserable. Many about her, who had beggars' souls, and only repined because workhouse fare was hard, could not comprehend her trouble; but one pious old woman, trying to help her, whispered, "that Sunday was always a comfort; that there was preaching and hymns; and the parson told them those who were poor went to Heaven as fast as the rich. Sunday come, you'll cheer up a bit," said she.

But old Jane could not forget how, poor as she had been, she had always gone to church on Sunday in a clean dress and tidy hat, and had never failed to put sixpence into the contribution plate.

"I doubt there's a dale of comfort in pauper preaching," she said.

But Sunday came. Old Jane's "first pauper Sunday," as she said to herself. There was some extra dish for breakfast. The chapel bell clanged and jangled under the uncertain touch of an old pauper, and the old people, the cripples, the half-witted folk, made their way in doleful procession, along the dusty path of the bare grounds to the door of the place of worship.

They stumbled into their seats, some of the old women noticing that the matron had a new bonnet; others moving mechanically, and heeding nothing. But soon a whisper came down the bench where Jane sat,—

"It's not our own minister. No, it's a new preacher—a young thing—just a bit of a boy." And dissatisfaction was expressed as a pale, slender young man, with a sweet face, and just a little limp in his gait, stepped into the pulpit and said: "Let us pray."

The prayer was brief and earnest, and the tones of his voice mollified all the old women at once; and then the hymn was sung by all the poor, cracked, wavering voices; and then the young man began to talk to them in a tender, kindly sort of way, as he might to his own old grandparents if they had been in sorrow.

"Young folks is mostly so stuck up. He isn't," said Jane's neighbour.

"I've seen the face before," thought Jane. "Where was it? I've heard the voice, and I still don't know where."

He was speaking of the trials of the poor now. And as she listened she felt that he knew by experience what they really were.

She listened, and forgot her surroundings; forgot that she was a pauper; remembered only that Heaven was for all, and God's love for all, and that Jesus was the Saviour of the beggar as of the king. And suddenly she heard the preacher say these words:

"Oh, I know how hard it is. I know. I know. Do you think I was born a rich man's son? No, friends; I was left in the great and wicked city a poor little orphan. I earned my bread by blacking boots. I was very lame then, and walked with a crutch, and I was not able to read."

"One day, a great boy beat and robbed me of my stock in trade. I was very ill after that, and I do not know what would have become of me but for a dear old woman—an old woman who earned her bread by sitting at a stall all day. She became my patron, she nursed me, she started me afresh in my boot-blackening, she helped me home, she cared for me as if I had been her child. Through her influence a rich gentleman was brought to notice me, and send me to school. That I have prospered, that I am no longer so sad a cripple, that I have an education, is all due, in the beginning under God, to that poor apple woman. I pray for her every night. I think of her as those who have known their mothers think of them; and I know now,

better than I did as a child, how much all that she did was for her to do, with her tiny earnings and a bed-ridden husband to care for.

"Ah, friends, when I speak of the trials of the poor I speak from experience; when I speak of the goodness and charity there is amongst them it is because I have experienced that also."

As he spoke on, the Order of Poverty seemed to become a crown, and not a cross.

His listeners looked more kindly at each other, lovingly at him. As for old Jane, she trembled from head to foot, for she knew this minister was he who had once been Little Lame Tim, the shoeblack.

As the procession filed out of the chapel again, she made her courtesy to the matron.

"May I speak to the gentleman that preached to us, mamam?" she said. "He knowed me once."

And permission being given, she lingered near the door until he passed through it, and gently touching his arm, said:—

"Sir, you wouldn't be remembering me after all these years, but I'm—"

But here the young preacher interrupted her.

"You're Aunt Jane!" he said, and took both her hands and kissed her on the forehead. "Aunt Jane! Thank Heaven, I have found you!"

It was poor old Jane's last pauper day. In a happy country home she now presides over a little parsonage, housekeeper to the clergyman, tenderly cared for as though she were of his own kin.

"I wonder you're not ashamed of me," she says sometimes, "a poor, unlearned old woman."

But the clergyman answers:—

"You were not ashamed of me, Aunt Jane, when I was Little Lame Tim the shoeblack."

K. D. R.

FACETIÆ.

A PAPER says that a wedding was recently celebrated, in which both bride and groom were deaf mutes. The newly-wedded pair are, no doubt, unspeakably happy.

"Yes," said the tramp, "I think he is the president of a charitable society, for he kicked me four rods farther than the average, and then set a durned great bulldog on me."

"HAVE you heard Miss Simpson sing since she returned from Italy?" "Several times." "Do you think she has improved?" "Very much." "In what particular?" "She doesn't sing as much as she used to."

WHEN Jones heard it remarked that the less a man drank in warm weather the cooler he was, he wanted to know how much drink he would have to go without in order to freeze to death.

CUSTOMER (to shopkeeper): "I see you've got a sign up, 'French and German spoken here.' You don't speak them yourself, and you haven't any clerk. Who speaks 'em?" Shopkeeper: "Why, the people who come in that want 'em spoken."

WOULDN'T PLAY THAT WAY.—Mother: "Why Harry, you haven't got through playing house down on the beach, have you?" Harry: "Yes, ma." Mother: "What's the matter? Didn't you have a good time?" Harry: "No, ma; that Carrie Judson is a mean old thing. She wouldn't fight a bit like you and papa, and when I hit her on the head she cried. She's no fun."

A LIVERPOOL jeweller hung a watch in his window and labelled it: "Look at this watch for £2," and the unsophisticated gentleman from the country who stared at the article and then went in and wanted the £2 had to get down on the floor with the jeweller and roll over and under him a number of times before he could be made to understand that he couldn't have any £2.

Why are fond mothers like novelists? Because they indulge infancy (in fancy).

"WELL," said an Irish attorney, "if it please the court, if I am wrong in this, I have another point that is equally conclusive."

WHERE one "man wants but little here below," three others are in hailing distance who want the earth.

Beware of the young man who writes love-letters with a typewriter. They may be dictated, and if he dictates before marriage, what won't he do afterwards?

A FASHION writer speaks of "cigar colour" as a fashionable tint. This is about as definite as to colour as "as big as a lump of chalk" is to size.

THE published report of a benevolent society says: "Notwithstanding the large amount paid for medicine and medical attendance, very few deaths occurred during the year."

Mrs. HOMESPUN, who has a terrible time every morning to get her young brood out of their beds, says she cannot understand why children are called the rising generation.

A STUDENT of human nature says: "It is easy enough to be agreeable in society. All you have to do is to listen while the other man talks. If the other man is a woman, you've got to listen anyway."

"I SAY, Jenkins, did you see that lengthy article in the paper this morning, headed, 'How to Manage a Wife?' " Jenkins (who is a henpecked husband): "Yes, but I didn't read it. No use."

"HAS my client any right?" asked a counsellor, out of patience, of a brother-wrangler at the bar. "I know not," was the response; "but one thing is certain—when you get through with him he'll have nothing left."

OLD Mrs. B. came to town last week on an excursion, and when she was asked why she was in such a hurry to leave, she replied: "I've got to; you see as how I came in on an excursion train, and my ticket perspires to-night."

Mrs. BELLION (to the principal of the school attended by her daughter): "Dear Madam: My daughter, Clarice, informs me that last year she was obliged to study vulgar fractions. Please do not let this happen again. If the dear child must study fractions, let them be as refined as possible."

THE boy said he thought his parents intended to move, but he had not heard anything said about it. He was asked the reason of his opinion, and replied that he had noticed that his father had begun to empty ashes upon the cellar floor, and they generally moved soon after that.

NO MORE SUITS.—When the famous Sir Thomas More was Lord Chancellor of England, it is recorded that, calling once for the next cause to be heard, he was told there were no more, at which a witty lawyer wrote the following lines:—

"When More some years had chancellor been,
No more suits did remain;
The same shall never more be seen,
Till More be there again."

THE DOG TESTIFIED.—A case was once brought into court in which the ownership of a dog was questioned. The judge knew the popular method in such trials, and determined to let the dog "testify by every mark of affection." "Stop!" exclaimed his Honour; "stop right there! Now, you, Mr. Plaintiff, get into that far corner out there; and you, Mr. Defendant, go into the corner over there. There! Now both of you whistle, and, Mr. Clerk, you loose the dog. The man whom the dog seeks is his master." The plaintiff and defendant whistled. The dog hardly noticed the sounds. They whistled again. The clerk let go his hold. The dog cast a look about him of mingled disgust and timidity, lifted one ear to the jury and another at the clerk; then, throwing back his head, he gave vent to a howl of terror, and shot out of the door like a meteor.

A MAN may be ashamed of the fashion of his nose, although he follows it.

"PA," said a young hopeful, "I know what a man who has seen better days is." "Well, my son, what is he?" "He is a man who makes you tired talking about himself."

ARABELLA had been waiting a long time for her caller to ask for his hat. At last he inquired: "What do I put you in mind of?" "A French clock," she said, softly. He did not know whether to be pleased, but soon rose and went on his way. The next morning he called upon a clockmaker and asked him what was the distinguishing trait of a French clock. The horologist said: "Why, it never goes!"

"YOUR son is rather small for his age, ma'am." "Yes, I suppose he is." "I presume you hear such remarks as mine frequently made?" "Oh, yes; but I am rather glad of it myself. You know they say that only small men become M.P.'s nowadays, and if he is a small man there may be a chance for him to go to Parliament some day," and the fond mother smiled as she stroked the urchin's curly pate.

A WORKING tailor in Edinburgh attended a temperance meeting in that city, and during an address given by a shabbily-dressed speaker frequently called out, "Order! order!" when he thought the audience were interrupting by their prolonged applause. After one of these outbursts, the speaker said: "Will that gentleman please inform me what kind of order he wants?" "Oh," replied the tailor, quite undaunted, "if ye pit it that way, I'll tak' an order frae ye for a decent suit o' clothes!"

THOUGHT SHE MIGHT BE.—She went into a furniture shop with her husband, a faint-hearted little man, who carried a second fiddle under his arm. She dragged the salesman all over the ground floor, and, leaving her husband downstairs, she took the man on the second floor to look at some willow chairs. The poor man, tired and weary, finally made some answer that kindled her wrath. "Do you know who I am?" she asked. "No, madam, I do not," he replied, politely. "Well, sir, I'd have you know I'm Mrs. Blank, and that is my husband downstairs!" "Oh, I beg your pardon; I thought possibly you might be Mr. Blank, and that was your wife downstairs."

SQUIDS.

IT is easy enuff to find a man that will endorse yure paper, but to find a companyun for everyday life is one ov the most difficult jobs I kno ov.

There is one thing that yu kant find, especially if you hunt for it, and that is the end ov a woman's tunc.

Fashion haz dun more to make men and wimmin polite toward each other than any other one thing.

Mankind are so artifishall that even when they are lame they kant limp natral.

I luv the old maids. Tho they don't bear fruit, they are the evergreens of kreasahn.

I am a firm believer in ghosts, and I would giv 14 hundred dollars to see one.

He who aims at perfeckshun will probably mis the mark; but he who aims at nothing is sure to hit it every time.

The most unkomfortably ackting person i ever saw was a bak woods man with a nn suit ov store clothes on.

Trusting in Providence is a good general rule; but I knu a church once that would rather trust in Providence than by a litening rod, and one day litening knokt that church higher than a boy's kite.

The man who is allwais anxions to bak up hiz opinyuns with a ten dollar bet, haz more konfidence in hiz munny than he haz in his statements.

There are more people who akt from impulse than from judgment.

If we should hav all our wishes gratified, we should miss a large share ov happiness that rightfully belongs to us.

JOSE BILLINGS.

SOCIETY.

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES, with Princesses Louise, Victoria, and Maud of Wales, have left Abergeldie. Their Royal Highnesses travelled in an open carriage, and the Duchess of Albany drove to Ballater and waited till the departure of the train. Her Majesty's guard of honour was in attendance at the station and presented arms. Their Royal Highnesses left by the Queen's messenger's train at 3.5 p.m., and arrived in Edinburgh the same night.

The weather was fair, and a large crowd awaited the Royal party at Haymarket Station. There the Prince and Princess alighted, and, amid loud cheering, at once drove off by Shandwick-place and Princess-street to the Balmoral Hotel, where another enthusiastic reception was given them by the assembled spectators.

Early in the forenoon of the following day the Prince and Princess of Wales, with the Princesses Louise, Victoria, and Maud, drove to the International Exhibition, where they were received by Lord Lothian, Lord Provost Clark, Sir James Gowans (president of the executive), and a select party of ladies and gentlemen. They remained in the Exhibition nearly four hours, and made a thorough inspection of the departments, expressing themselves highly delighted. Before leaving the grounds the Prince and Princess each planted a tree.

In the afternoon the party drove to Newbattle, and had tea with Lord and Lady Lothian. They returned to the city at seven o'clock, and left for London by the eight o'clock mail. Immense crowds watched all their movements, and the reception accorded was most enthusiastic.

We have it on good authority, says *Modern Society*, that the Queen wishes Prince Albert Victor to marry shortly, but it seems that the young man's parents do not share Her Majesty's desire, while the Prince himself has a very vague notion of his own feelings in the matter. So it will be seen that the state of things is not wholly satisfactory. But there is no reason why the nation should urge on any matrimonial project in this direction, as substantial provision for the couple would have to be made out of the public funds, whether the object of His Royal Highness's choice brought money or came to our shores as penniless as most of those who have accepted the hand of an English Royal.

THE wedding of Mr. G. Ernest Fooks, surgeon, Bombay Army, and son of General C. A. St. P. Fooks, Bengal Staff Corps, and Alexina Louisa, daughter of Mr. J. Crawford Dodgson, late Bengal Civil Service, took place on October 6 at St. Saviour's, Paddington. The bride wore a dress of rich ivory satin draped with Brussels lace, the gift of her aunt, Mrs. Garrett, and trimmed with pearl embroidery; a tulle veil with sprays of natural orange flowers; she carried a posy bouquet of rare exotics. The four bridesmaids wore costumes of pale pink Indian silk, with cream lace skirts and hats to match. Their pink and white bouquets and pearl brooches were the gifts of the bridegroom. The bride's travelling dress was of gendarme blue cloth, with striped silk skirt and bonnet to match.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ARTHUR MORRIS, King's Royal Rifles, was married to Miss Katherine Cecil Annette Trower, daughter of Mr. George S. Trower, at St. Peter's Church, Cranley-gardens, on October 6, Captain Ward, King's Royal Rifles, attended the bridegroom as best man. There were five bridesmaids, prettily dressed in white China silk trimmed with lace, and hats to match, trimmed with velvet and ospreys, and each wearing a pearl pin, with two hearts entwined of pearl and coral. The bride, who was given away by her father, was attired in rich white satin, trimmed with Lille lace and orange blossom.

STATISTICS.

OPEN SPACES.—In this year's report of the Metropolitan Board of Works the following are given as the areas of the "Parks, Commons, and Open Spaces" under the Board's control:—Finsbury-park, 115 acres; Southwark-park, 63; Gardens on the Victoria, Albert, and Chelsea Embankments, and in Leicester-square, 14; Blackheath, 267; Hampstead-heath, 240; Shepherd's-bush-common, 8; London-fields, 264; Hackney-downs, 413; Wells-street-common, 203; North Mill-field, 232; South Mill-field, 344; Clapton-common, 71; Stoke Newington-common, 54; Tooting Beck-common, 144; Tooting-Graveney-common, 63; Clapham-common, 220; Bostall-heath, 55; Plumstead-common, 100; Shoulder-of-Mutton-green, 5; Wormwood-scrubbs, 193; Eel Brook-common, 14; Parson's-green, 4; Brook-green, 7; Peckham-rye, 64; Goose-green, 64; Nunheal-green, 14; Streatham-common, 66; Highbury-fields, 254—total, 1,834½ acres. To these is to be added the new Dulwich-park, 72 acres, now in course of formation.

GEMS.

BAD men excuse their faults; good men will leave them.

THE true test of a great man—that at least which must secure his place among the highest order of great men—is his having been in advance of his age.

By struggling with misfortunes we are sure to receive some wounds in the conflict; but a sure method to come off victorious is by running away.

LET us be thankful that our sorrow lives in us an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy—the one poor word includes all our best insight and our best love.

BUT we get accustomed to mental as well as bodily pain, losing our insensibility to it; it becomes a habit of our lives, and we cease to imagine a condition of perfect ease as possible to us.

THROUGH the night to light, storm to calm, frost to spring, strife to peace, woe to joy, sweat to sleep, cross to crown, death to life—such is Heaven's order in nature and in grace.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GLOSS FOR SHIRT FRONTS.—To laundry shirts to give the fine gloss to the fronts take of white wax one ounce, spermaceti two ounces, melt them together with a gentle heat. When you have prepared a sufficient amount of starch in the usual way for a dozen pieces, put into it a piece of the polish about the size of a large pea, using more or less, according to the large or small washings. Or thick gum solution (made by pouring boiling water upon gum arabic) may be used. One tablespoon to a pint of starch gives clothes a beautiful gloss.

TO TRANSFER NEWSPAPER PRINTS TO GLASS.—First coat the glass with dammar varnish, or else with Canada balsam, mixed with an equal volume of oil of turpentine, and let it dry until it is very sticky, which takes half a day or more. The printed paper to be transferred should be well soaked in soft water and carefully laid upon the prepared glass, after removing surplus water with blotting paper, and pressed upon it so that no air bubbles or drops of water are seen underneath. This should dry a whole day before it is touched; then with wetted fingers begin to rub off the paper at the back. If this be skilfully done almost the whole of the paper can be removed, leaving simply the ink upon the varnish. When the paper has been removed, another coat of varnish will serve to make the whole more transparent.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SENSIBILITY.—Acute sensibilities are intended as a direct means of inspiring generous impulses and cultivating a benevolent character. To him who is always sensitive for others as well as for himself they are not a torment, but a blessing. The pleasure and pain he feels, and the sources to which he traces each, are his continual guides to show him how to diffuse the one and to mitigate the other in his intercourse with mankind. Nothing is more selfish than a narrow, self-pitying sensitiveness, nothing more ennobling than a sensitive spirit keenly alive to all good and kindly influences.

WHAT GREAT MEN THOUGHT OF THE CORSET.—The "Medical Record" tells us that Napoleon Bonaparte said to Dr. Corvisart, speaking of the corset: "This wear, born of coquetry and bad taste, which murders women and ill treats their offspring, tells of frivolous tastes, and warns me of an approaching decadence." Joseph II. of Austria was very severe upon the corset, and made a law confining its use to abandoned women. The last king of France embodied his opinion of this abomination in this stinging epigram: "Once you met Dianas, Venuses, or Niobes; now-a-days only wasps." The great naturalist, Cuvier, was walking one day with a young lady who was a victim of tight lacing, in a public garden in Paris. A lovely blossom upon an elegant plant drew from her an expression of admiration. Looking at her pale, thin face, Cuvier said: "You were like this flower once; to-morrow it will be as you are now." Next day he led her to the same spot, and the beautiful flower was dying. She asked the cause. "This plant," replied Cuvier, "is an image of yourself. I will show you what is the matter with it." He pointed to a cord bound tightly around the stem, and said, "You are fading away in exactly the same manner under the compression of your corset, and you are losing by degrees all your youthful charms, just because you have not courage to resist this dangerous fashion."

A CUBAN WOMAN.—In the physical beauty of the Cuban woman the commanding features are the foot, whose daintiness and symmetry are marvellous; the supple, willowy grace of movement of person, the exquisitely modelled form, and the eyes, which never lose their lustre and glow. Cuban women wear shoes no larger than the smallest size for women over here. Nor is this diminutive size the result of any pinching process. She is born that way. She is the most graceful woman on her feet, in her walk and carriage, in the promenade, or in the dance, that you ever saw. Of her form, it is perfection. Nine women out of ten you meet are models of symmetry. There is a great delicacy in line and proportion. They do not torture their persons or themselves. The Cuban woman's face may be said to be wholly interesting and lovely rather than wholly beautiful. Its beauty is in its expression rather than in its repose. This face is of the Latin mould, oval, and with a delicate protruding of a pretty and shapely chin. Her complexion is warm, creamy, with no carnation in her cheeks. But her mouth, large, mobile, tremulous, with just a suggestion of pathos in the slight drawing down at the corners, has lips so red and so ripe that her ever-perfect teeth dazzle in brilliant contrast. Her hair is of that lead-black darkness which suggests a weird, soft mist upon the night, and is indeed a glory for ever. But her eyes are her priceless, crowning loveliness, her never-ending power and charm. They cannot be described. When you say that behind their long, dark, half-hiding lashes they are large, dark, dreamy, yet glowing, flashing with fire, liquid with languor, you have only hinted their inexpressible expressiveness. They are the same eyes at nine, at nineteen, and at ninety.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LOTTIE.—No business addresses can be given.

AMELIA JANE.—JANUARY 29, 1868, fell on Thursday.

H. T. R.—The Bermudas were named after John Bermudez, their Spanish discoverer.

A. W.—No personal knowledge of their efficacy. Why not consult a regular physician?

CHERY.—To cure soft corns, put a little powdered chalk on a piece of cotton-wool between the toes night and morning.

F. G.—Los Angeles, "city of the angels," was so named from its beautiful situation and delightful climate.

P. M. E.—The term "chamber music" is used to distinguish between music written for church or theatre and music specially fitted for performances in a small room.

MAJORIE.—The only suggestion we can make is that if your husband is determined on the matter, rather than let the poor child be a cause of strife between you you should send it to some of your own relations.

W. O. C.—You had better write to the Consul-General for New Zealand, who will, no doubt, be able to obtain the information you require. Have you written to your sister?

MAUDE HOPE.—There is a great discrepancy in the ages, but if you really love and respect him you will not be doing wrong in marrying him, but be quite sure of your own heart.

E. S. S.—Have nothing to do with him till you are quite certain whether the first marriage was legal. From your statement we should infer that in marrying you he would be committing bigamy.

M. W.—It is a lady's prerogative to select whom she shall or shall not invite to call upon her. It would be decidedly impolite for the gentleman to thrust his attentions upon either male or female acquaintances.

ROSE.—To make cream cake, take four teaspoonfuls of flour, three of sugar, one of butter, one of cream, five eggs, and three-fourths of a teaspoonful of soda. Rub the butter and sugar together, mix in the other ingredients, and bake as pound cake.

G. R. L.—No well-bred man will enter a lady's house unless invited to do so; consequently, one who deliberately walks in with the lady he has escorted home, should devote some of his leisure moments to the study of social etiquette before again venturing forth into polite society.

BONNIE BRES.—It would be very indiscreet for parties to get married under such circumstances. They would run great risk of making themselves miserable. The good, old-fashioned way of allowing a reasonable time for acquaintance and courtship before marriage is much to be preferred.

R. T. S.—If the owner of the dog sues your father for his value, a jury will decide the question of your right to shoot the animal, after hearing both sides of the case. On your statement, we think the decision will be in your favour; but there may be modifying circumstances which you have inadvertently omitted to mention, that will cause the case to be decided in favour of the owner of the dog.

E. L. S.—In every card game, when a pack of cards is discovered to be incorrect, the following general rule comes into operation: "If a pack is discovered to be incorrect, redundant, or imperfect, the deal in which the discovery is made is void. All preceding deals stand good." A full pack consists of 52 cards—four suits of thirteen each—and never more than that number except when that modern innovation, the Joker, is employed, which of course increases the number to 53.

A. T. H.—The age of the pig is known up to three years by the teeth; after that there is no certainty. The temporary teeth are complete in three or four months; about the sixth month the premolars between the tusks and the first pair of molars appear; in six to ten months the tusks and posterior incisors are replaced; in twelve months the two years' other incisors. The fourth permanent molar appears at six months; the fifth pair at ten months, and the six and last at eighteen months.

G. D. H.—The only competent system of bookkeeping is that known as double entry, so called from the fact that the complete record of any transaction requires at least two entries in the ledger—one on the debit side of some account, and one on the credit or creditor side of some other account. The utility of this system consists in the philosophical adjustment of mathematical sets to the most exacting requirements of finance, and in the tests afforded of the correctness of the work at any point.

J. C. F.—All the "quaker words" you mention (except seismography) come from the Greek word *seismos*, which means an earthquake. The "seismic area" means the tract on the earth's surface within which the shock of an earthquake is felt. A seismometer, or a seismoscope, is an instrument for measuring the duration and force of an earthquake. Seismology is the science of earthquakes. As geography is a description of the surface of the earth, hence the statement you quote, that "seismology is undoubtedly closely allied with geography," means that earthquakes are in some way connected with or affected by the movements of the earth, which is not generally favoured by scientific men.

P. P. T.—Tuesday, August 30, 1861.

MINA.—Jakob Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen were noted fairy-tale writers.

C. S. G.—Very dark-brown hair. A very delicate, pretty specimen of penmanship.

DORA.—The Constitution of the United States was adopted September 17, 1787.

J. L.—Camphor, internally or externally, will not improve the complexion.

S. W. G.—Wash your hands frequently during the day with cold water, wiping them thoroughly each time, and the profuse perspiration will be perceptibly checked.

EMMELINE.—Carbonate of soda will not clean the teeth; pure castile soap and water, applied with a medium-soft brush, will make them white.

ELLA.—It is not considered proper for a lady to make promiscuous acquaintances of the opposite sex without being introduced by a mutual friend of both parties.

D. H. H.—The Latin sentence "*Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit*," is translated thus: "Perhaps it will be pleasant hereafter to remember these things." When the French desire to use the expression to take leave, they say, "*Four prendrez congé*."

JOE.—Surat is a town of India, capital of a district bearing the same name, on the Taptee River, 150 miles by rail north of Bombay. It is a place of great antiquity and fame, and in 1796 had an estimated population of 600,000. According to the last census it had a population of 107,142. Within the town there is an establishment under the French flag.

LOVE LIVES ON.

The world is full of weeping,
There is sighing in the air
From loving ones overburdened
With a heavy weight of care;
Too hopes and dreams of beauty
That we feed our hearts upon
Have disappeared for ever,
Yet Love lives on.

From scenes where joy delighted
To spread its shining tent
The glow of youth has vanished,
The golden hours are spent;
The lovely flowers are faded,
The singing-birds are gone,
And graves are all about us,
Yet Love lives on.

Washed down by tribulations,
Oppressed with grief and pain,
Within our standard dwellings
In sadness we remain;
Intent upon our losses,
The weeds of woe we don,
And mourn our lot unmindful
That Love lives on!

Despite neglect and coldness,
Despite the changes dear,
The trials and denials
That are ours from year to year,
Amid the desolation,
Oft, strange phenomenon!
As fresh and fair as ever,
Still Love lives on!

J. P.

ARICA.—1. Light-brown hair. 2. A lady having fair skin, blue eyes and hair of the s'ade mentioned, would be classed as a demi-blonde.

G. H. A.—"pieces of eight" is another name for the coin generally known as a piastre. In Italy, a piastre is worth about 3s. 6d.; in Spain it is the same as the Spanish or American dollar, that is, 4s., while the Turkish piastre, formerly worth 1s., is now worth only about 4d. A moldore is a gold coin of Portugal valued at about 25s. in our currency. A crusado is a Portuguese coin, having no equivalent in our money, so called from having a cross stamped on one side.

LADY MAY.—1. Before Queen Victoria married Prince Albert, her full name was Alexandra Victoria DE TE Guelph, but after that event the surname (if such names are really applicable to Royalty, which most authorities deny) of Her Majesty and family became that of the Prince Consort. The family name of the House of Saxony is Wettin, and therefore the Queen's plain name would, under ordinary circumstances, be Wettin. 2. March 6, 1854, came on a Monday.

TOM R.—Doubtless "Elsie" is even more beautiful than you say. In title her album the following tribute to her beauty, grace and virtue:
"Endures the best, my lady frank and fair;
Love lights her eyes, and blushes deck her cheeks;
Sweet fragrance of her deeds pervades the air—
Innocence that virtue gives—while proudly there
Exalted honour loud her praises speaks."

S. S. D.—The term Teutonic is derived from Teutones, the name of a nation or tribe first mentioned by Pytheas, who wrote about 320 B.C., as then inhabiting a part of the Cimbric Chersonesus, or Jutland. For the next 200 years there is no further mention of the Teutones—that is, not until 113 B.C., when they appear in history as ravaging Gaul, and in conjunction with the Cimbric and Ambrosians, threatening the existence of the Roman Republic. The Cimbric having gone in to Spain, the Teutones and Ambrosians were at length defeated by C. Marius in a great battle at Aquæ Sextie, in Gaul, 102 B.C.

W. H.—Quite regular, neat penmanship, but the spelling is faulty in many particulars.

AMINA.—Losing's "Field Book of the Revolution" is considered a standard history of that stirring period.

G. H. H.—The business standing of the firms named can be very easily ascertained. We cannot vouch for them.

F. D.—If the gentleman has proved to be so agreeable and pleasant after a regular introduction, there would be no impropriety in asking him to call upon you at your home. Never extend such an invitation to any one until he has proved himself worthy of the honour.

W. A.—The hands of some persons are moist at all times, and consequently steel articles used by them quickly rust and become black, while the same articles may be handled by others and become brightened by contact with their dry skin.

EFFIE.—1. Poor grammar and passable penmanship. 2. Nothing but artificial means can be employed for darkening your bangs which have grown out lighter than the rest of the hair. Trimming them will obliterate the trouble for a while.

D. T. S.—It is not considered polite to send a lady a letter written on a half sheet of paper. No objection can be made to the use of tinted letter paper, but in good society pure white is generally used by male correspondents. Black ink should be invariably used.

E. R. S.—If you send a specimen of the plant, we can be better able to furnish some information regarding its generic name. No clue to its identity can be obtained from any botanical manuals consulted, nor can professional authorities throw any light on the subject.

E. H. H.—Mrs. Rowson has written a very pleasing novel founded on events in the life of the unfortunate Charlotte Temple, who was a real character, and to whom a monument in Trinity Churchyard was erected in the city of New York. It is well worth reprinting.

J. T. S.—A colour-sergeant is a sergeant detailed to carry the regimental colours. He is usually selected for military deportment and soldierly bearing, and when carrying the colours is escorted by a guard of seven corporals. In the British service he has a distinct rank.

JOSPHINE.—When writing to a gentleman the manner in which a lady should address him depends greatly upon the degree of intimacy existing between them. If he is a near friend she may head the communication "Dear Mr. Blank;" in other cases such a familiar form would not be admissible.

C. H. W.—1. A lady should not exchange photographs with a mere acquaintance of the opposite sex, no matter how "handsome, noble and good" he may be. By doing so she is running the risk of exposing herself to misconstruction of her motives by the gentleman as well as others. Some people are apt to jump at conclusions and talk about them, whether right or wrong. 2. A golden lock of rare beauty.

H. K.—1. We do not care to disturb your domestic harmony by expressing a candid opinion of your stepfather's actions, and will leave the settlement of the dispute to yourselves. Doubtless mutual concessions can be brought about by a consultation of all the parties concerned. 2. It seems as if you were possessed of a vivacious, happy disposition, if hand-writing can be taken as an indication of a person's character.

LADY S.—Rhubarb made according to the subjoined formula is highly recommended by reliable authorities: Take 1 ounce each of powdered assafras, allspice, yellow dock and wintergreen, 1 ounce each of wild-cherry bark and coriander, 1 ounce of hops and 3 quarts of treacle. Pour 2 gallons of boiling water over these ingredients and let the mixture stand for twenty-four hours. Then filter the resulting liquor and add 1 pint of yeast. In another twenty-four hours it will be fit for use.

R. H. H.—The word "news" has been fancifully derived from the initial letters of the four cardinal points of the compass—north, east, west, and south in a book entitled "Wit's Recreations," which first appeared about 1640, appear the following lines inuent the subject:

"When news doth come, if any would discuss
The letter of the word, resolve thus:
News is conveyed by letter, word or mouth,
And comes from North, East, West, or South."

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